

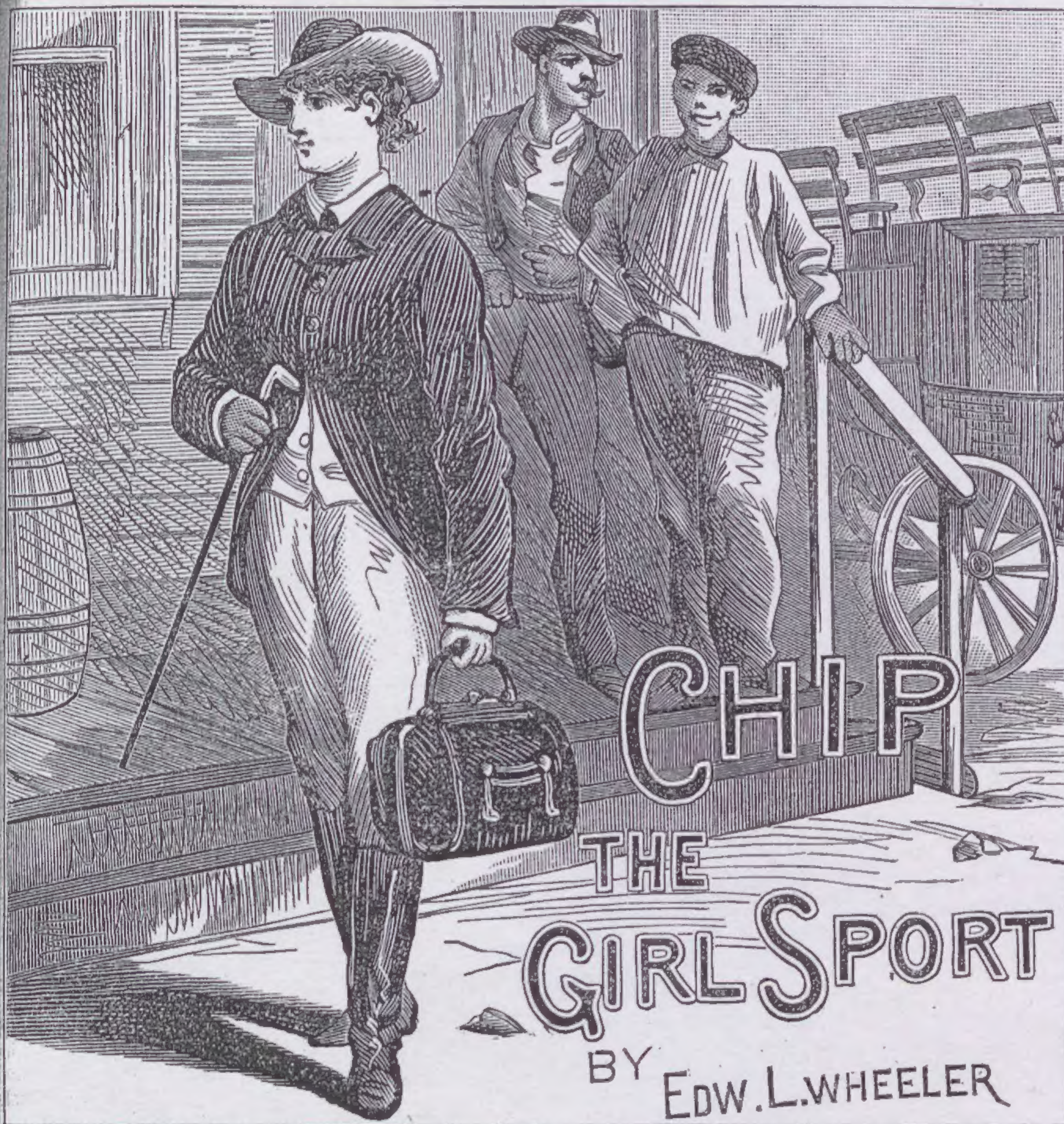
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CHIP THE GIRL SPORT BY EDW. L. WHEELER

CINNAMON CHIP STRODE DOWN THE STREET, TWIRLING A GOLD HEADED CANE IN ONE HAND
AND CARRYING A SMALL SACHEL IN THE OTHER.

No. 4.—“Rosebud Rob” Novels.

Chip, the Girl Sport;

OR,

The Golden Idol of Mt. Rosa.

A Tale of Northern Arizona.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF “DEADWOOD DICK” NOVELS, “ROSEBUD ROB” NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A GALA DAY AT BUMMER'S BEND.

PERHAPS the reader of this romance will smile, when we announce the *locale* of the first scene at Bummer's Bend.

That such a place existed, and does yet exist, there can be no doubt, nor is there anything strange in the title, when in the catalogue of the names of Western towns, one can pick out such suggestive titles as “Cut Throat Gulch,” “Bill Thompson's Mouth,” and “Misery Center.”

Northern Arizona, the clime!

Bummer's Bend the town.

Nestling down at the base of a mighty mountain, among whose foot-hills many miners had scattered their cabins; a couple of hundred rude shanties there were, in addition to a small fort, a blacksmith-shop, a few stores, dance-houses, saloons, and gambling-dens.

Taken all in all, Bummer's Bend was a “loud” town, and being as it were *the* town of the wild, sparsely inhabited country in which it was located, it boasted of a “hefty” floating population, and a fair tract of surrounding mining territory.

Situated on the eastern side of the mountains, near a sharp bend in the towering rocky chain, it pleasantly faced a long level stretch of prairie to the east and south.

These prairies stretched away, seemingly to the eastern horizon, and the only thing perceptible upon the bosom of the vast expanse, except its beautiful verdure, was the log fort and a few outbuildings, about a half a mile from the town.

The fort numbered about fifty men, who were under the charge of an old army veteran, General Howard by name, perhaps more out of respect for his past deeds of valor, than his present value in the field of active service, for he was now getting old, white-haired, and gouty.

Why this fort, in the extreme wilderness, was a question only the rulers at Washington could probably answer, as the surrounding territory was but little settled, and the town of Bummer's Bend had been created since the advent of Uncle Sam's men. The first discovery of gold in the mountains back of the present site of the town, had been made by the soldiers, and by strict orders from the commandant, had been kept a secret for a period of several years, during which time General Howard and his men had enriched themselves in a moderate way.

But secrets, like preserves, don't keep long, if not closely sealed, and this one, as usual, finally leaked out.

A soldier deserted, and bore the news over into Nevada, and the result was an immediate stampede of miners from that territory to the Arizona discovery.

They came in swarms, men of all classes and types, and on their finding “sure signs” in the mountains, pockets and gulches, the town of Bummer's Bend sprung into existence, and soon grew to the size of the small city we find it at the opening of our story.

It was not a pretty town, for there was but one street running around the base of the foot-hills, and the houses not upon this thoroughfare, were strewn around among the foot-hills, and out upon the edge of the prairie.

But despite its comparative isolation from other golden burghs, Bummer's Bend was a fast town—a sportive town—a fashionable town!

A few speculators and men of leisure had brought their families with them to the little city of the wilderness, and they had “chipped in,” and formed a little social world by themselves, to which any one could be admitted who had a fair pedigree, a gentle appearance and behavior, and an unlimited bank account with which to furnish him or herself with fashionable raiment.

Then there was another class, composed of sports who sported, sports who gambled, sports who bet, and sports who did anything of a “genteel” nature by which to add to the condition of their coffers, from picking a pocket to stopping a stage.

Three classes there were, and the third class was composed of the toiling miners who drudged at the pick and shovel from sunrise to sunset, in search of golden gifts.

Sports and pastimes were among the pleasures of the classes who did not work, and one of the principal diversions was horse-racing.

Just outside of the town upon the level prairie, a mile track had been arranged, in a circle, and here many an exciting race occurred. High purses were lost and won, and for miles around, Bummer's Bend was noted as a “horse-town.”

At the time of which we write, at but a recent date, the country adjacent to the wilderness city was infested by bands of mixed Indians, who hunted through the unsettled portions of the territory, and, in fact, held certain portions as their own. They were composed of remnants of tribes, Cheyennes, Sioux, Apaches, and Arapahoes predominating.

These rovers were widely feared, for, although there was no declared hostility between them and the whites, many butcheries were perpetrated by them, and rapine and plunder appeared to be one of their chief objects.

Few of the citizens of Bummer's Bend cared to venture alone into the depths of the mountains, or out upon the almost boundless prairies, and miners generally moved and worked in parties of ten or a dozen for fear of an attack, several bands of miners having been surprised and butchered by these Red Bedouins.

One of the leading chiefs of the Indians was an old battle-scarred warrior of the Apache

nation, who boasted of having in his day raised over a thousand scalps, and whose name was Hoko-me-go-to, or the White Face, the latter appellation having been given him on account of the bleached appearance of his countenance, which was nearly as white as a Caucasian's, while the remainder of his body was brown and swarthy.

The White Face was much feared and hated by the miners, yet he had the freedom of the town.

The reason of this was generally conceded to be because the people were afraid to drive him out, for he counted his savage horde of warriors by hundreds, and did he choose, it was estimated that he could clean out the little city of the wilderness without half trying.

His warriors also were frequently seen in the town, their mission being to procure bad whisky in exchange for skins or gold.

On several occasions old White Face had taken a part in the races, mounted upon his jet-black steed, but the trotting and running stock of Bummer's Bend was choice, and the chief of the Bedouins of the Plains had lost his gold.

But on the opening day of our little romance, another grand free-for-all race was to come off, and the news brought crowds of people flocking to Bummer's Bend—miners, trappers, ruffians and red-skins, all came in to see the sport, for it was to be an occasion of unusual interest.

Miss Evelyn Howard, the general's daughter, at the fort, was going to match her superb saddle-horse for a thousand dollars, against the field.

The Howards were acknowledged great people by the Bendites, and it had long been considered that beautiful but haughty Miss Evelyn had the swiftest racer that had ever entered Arizona.

Early in the morning the town presented the appearance of a holiday, for the street was filled with people, and others were skimming over the prairie near the course in the bright sunlight of the beautiful September day.

When the overland stage came rolling into town, drawn by its six prancing horses, it also discharged another cargo to add to the audience at the races.

Among the passengers were several strangers, among whom was one who instantly attracted attention.

A young woman, not over eighteen years of age, round and symmetrical of form, of the medium stature of women, strikingly handsome in face, and attired in male costume, from the small knee-boots of patent leather, breeches of fine whitish woolen, vest to match, "b'iled" shirt, with collar and tie, and blazing diamond upon the bosom, and jaunty velvet jacket, to a white woolen slouch hat upon the head.

Yes, a real woman, and a remarkably pretty one, too, for, in addition to an attractive form, her face boasted of rarely-chiseled features, cheeks of healthful tint, a mouth just large enough to be witching, relieved, as it was, by rosy lips and two rows of pearly teeth; eyes dark and dancing with mischievous expression, and a pure, fair forehead, from which hair of a brown hue clustered in light curls close to her head.

Down the street strode this eccentric charac-

ter, with a swaggering gait, after leaving the stage, twirling a gold-headed cane in one hand and carrying a small sachel in the other—down the street she went with the utmost independence manifested in her bearing, and many an eye followed her with an admiring and surprised expression.

Armed with a pair of revolvers thrust in her belt was this new-comer, and probably capable of using them, if the case demanded.

A tall, stalwart, buckskin-clad individual, with blonde hair and mustache, who stood upon the steps of the "hotel," in company with another man, gazed at the girl dandy admiringly.

"By George! she's a clipper, Pete!" he said, enthusiastically, as he turned to his companion, who was a Chinaman—an almond-eyed, comically flat-faced son of Confucius, with a fat, squatty form clad in breeches, and a semi-gown, with sandals upon his feet, and a slouch hat upon his head. "That girl is a *character*, in this wild mining-life drama, and I'll bet she's game, too. No galoot can pick on her with impunity, and I'll bet high on it. Eh, what do you say, Pigtail?"

"Me t'inkee Captain Mayburn muchee right!" the Celestial replied, with an assenting nod. "Muchee fine gal—berry muchee stylee, too."

"Ha, ha! you're solid, there, Pigtail. She's what we'd call a stunner, down in the Black Hills country. Shouldn't wonder if we'd see her down to the races to-day, too. By the way, I opine we'd better saunter down that way." And the two men, so strikingly different in appearance, strolled away toward the race-course, arm in arm.

That they, too, were strangers in Bummer's Bend was evident, for the citizens of the town gave them nearly as many curious glances as they did the girl dandy.

Two men seemed to be particularly impressed with their appearance.

The one a man of five-and-thirty, with a dusky complexion, black hair, eyes and mustache, and the careful dress of a city dandy;—the other a swarthy-skinned, scarred-faced fellow, clad in greasy buckskin—evidently a half-breed, judging by the cast of countenance, the wild tigerish eyes, and the straight "Injun" hair.

Both were Bummer's-Bendites; the first, Dell Guthrie, or Dandy Dell, a nephew of old General Howard, and an authority in the little mining-town, of which he was "mayor," and manager. A gambler, a horse-jockey, a dead-shot, and a great brag, he bore an unenviable reputation, and was disliked, if not feared by the great majority of the people. A noted bravo he had become by openly killing his "pair of pilgrims," in cold blood, and the act had strengthened him as "boss" of the town.

His companion, the half-breed, was called Lynx, and was a fit tool and associate for this ruffian dandy.

"Who are those two galoots?" Guthrie asked, as Captain Mayburn and the Chinaman walked away. "It appears to me I have seen the American, before."

"They belong to a party of rangers who are

camped around the Bend," the half-breed replied. "The American is the captain."

"A band of rangers, eh? What are they doing here?—where are they going?"

"Don't know. Camped last night. Got good horses—pack-mules, too."

"Then they are bound for the interior, I'll wager. How many are there of them?"

"Four—the captain, whose name is Mayburn, a nigger, a Dutchman, and the Chinaman."

"Humph! a motley gang I must admit. I must look into this matter, directly. There may be reasons why they should not go further west. But, at present, I've other business. I'm to ride Evelyn's "Flying Star," and I'm going to show these Bendites how to come in at the death. There's a purse of five thousand dollars in the hands of the treasurer—a thousand for each entry, and if I win the race, I have half."

"But you will not win," Lynx said, suddenly pointing down the street, toward where the last of the passengers was just disembarking from the stage. "Yonder is a horse and rider who have won every running race the past year, down in Colorado and Dakota."

Dandy Dell turned in the direction indicated by the half-breed, and saw a horse and rider galloping leisurely into the town, over the route the stage had recently come.

The horse, perhaps, we should describe first.

It was a handsome animal of about the medium height, with a round graceful body, an arching neck and small head, while the limbs were clean and supple, and the mane and tail long and wavy. In color this animal was remarkably like those known as circus horses, being mainly bay color, with large white spots dotted in different places upon its body and limbs.

It was gayly caparisoned with gold-mounted saddle and bridle, and was truly a beauty of the equine race.

The rider was fully as striking in appearance as the horse—a young man of medium stature, well developed in muscular formation with an independent cast of countenance, handsome brown eyes and hair—the eyes cool and penetrating in their glance—and a mustache to match that was waxed to a point at either end.

In costume he looked the sport to perfection, which he was. The patent leathers upon his feet, the perfectly-fitting suit of light gray cassimeres, the boiled shirt, collarless and open at the throat, and a whitish slouch hat upon his head were his dandified make-up.

A massive gold chain reached around his neck and returned to his watch-pocket; a jeweled riding-whip was held in his fair, effeminate hand; in a belt around his waist were a pair of heavy revolvers, such as a borderman desires to use when he means business, and a silver-hilted sheath dirk.

Straight up the street rode the Sport, whistling a snatch from some popular opera, and gazing from one side of the street to the other with the utmost unconcern, as if he were not the observed of all observers.

"Oh! so that's the animal as is going to beat Miss Evelyn's racer, is it?" Guthrie demanded, in reply to the half-breed's last remark.

"Him! I dare say you are mistaken, Lynx.

The runner was never born, that could pass Flying Star."

"I hope so, boss, but reckon you're wrong. That hoss is a cuss, and that man in the saddle is a second cuss."

"Bah! he is a band-box popinjay, endeavoring to appear at his best on coming to a new town. A week hence you'll see him using the pan and shovel for a living, no doubt. Come along. I'll speedily take the conceit out of that coxcomb, or my name is not Dandy Dell!"

CHAPTER II.

CINNAMON CHIP'S CHALLENGE.

AND straight down the street strode the self-appointed Mayor of Bummer's Bend, with stately tread, and the air of a person who was going to conquer a nation.

A few of the idlers followed close at his heels, for, having overheard his threat, they had reason to believe that something of an exciting nature would occur. There had not been even a decent dog-fight in the past week, and after such an extremely lengthy period of stagnation, these ites of the Bend had the best reason to expect that something "handsome" was about to be done.

The "mayor" was noted as a propagator of quarrels and "skewrups," and never as yet had he failed to "comb" down his man with comparative ease.

Down the street strode he until he came to the steps of the Girard, which, by the way, was the largest and most imposing structure at the Bend, being a combined restaurant, lodging-house, saloon, gambling-house and dance-house, the latter three occupations occupying the first floor.

Before the Girard had the elegant Sport of the spotted horse dismounted, and was busy tying his whip to the saddle when the mayor came up.

"Hello! what have we here?" Guthrie exclaimed, approaching the horse and slapping it upon the thigh, whereupon the animal suddenly laid back its ears and reared its hind feet in an unbecoming manner.

"Whoa! Curse the beast! What's the matter?"

"Look out, you! Don't get into too close proximity to the colt's feet, or he might be tempted to rear up behind, my friend," the Sport remarked, dryly. "He isn't particularly fond of strangers."

"So I perceive," Guthrie growled, chagrined that an old horseman like himself should be kicked at, at the first introduction. "By St. Christopher, if I owned that mule I'd learn him better manners. What's your price on the animal, my boy?"

And the mayor's eyes snapped as he counted one blow, by addressing a man vastly his superior in personal appearance, as "my boy."

"The colt is not for sale," the Sport replied, quietly, as he finished securing his whip, and came up from the street without tying the horse. "That little beast is not for sale—at least, it would take more money than you have got to buy him."

"Humph! Perhaps you are aware how much money I have got?" Dandy Dell growled, flam-

ing into a passion. "You'd better be careful how you wag your tongue around this town, my Christian friend."

"Oh! I had, eh?" the Sport demanded, leaning against an awning-post and surveying this Dandy Dell coolly, as he puffed leisurely at a freshly-lighted cigar. "If so, why so?"

"I'll pretty quick show you, if you give me any of your sass. I'm boss of this town, if you want to know, and when I say butter issalt, it's salt, and no one durst contradict it. I don't allow no impudent coxcomb puppies to come to this town and lip around, not for a cent."

"Oh! you don't, eh?" the Sport again replied, a sarcastic smile wreathing his lips. "If not, why not?"

"See here! what do you mean?" Dandy Dell cried, his rage increasing as he perceived that his bluster did not have the least apparent effect upon the other, but rather amused him. "Do you want I should take you by the collar of your jacket and boot you out of the town?"

"If you have had your life insured lately in a good reliable company, it would not be a bad idea to make the attempt, being as you seem desirous of courting death," was the calm reply. "If, however, you are desirous of continuing an earthly existence here below, I should confidently advise you to endeavor to mind your own business!"

"Mind my own business, will I?" the Dandy roared, fairly boiling with rage. "Not for you, I won't, you puppy! If you want fight, I'm the man for you, I am. Step out here, and I'll mop the street with you until you won't be worth a cent a pound for old bones."

"Thank you for your kind offer, my royal duke, but as I haven't had my breakfast yet, I am not in a proper condition for mortal combat. If you wait till I have digested my daily bread, you may count on me. I'll be down to the races—come and see me, there, and I am yours truly." And with a cool laugh the Sport waved his hand, and entered the Girard.

With an oath Guthrie was about to follow him, but the half-breed caught him by the arm, and pulled him back.

"Stop!" he commanded, in a low tone. "It won't pay you to provoke a quarrel with that fellow. He is more than your equal with any weapon you can name, and you would surely get the worst of it. Let him go—there are other ways to deal with him, most surely."

"How do you mean?" the general's fiery nephew demanded.

"Never mind, just now," the half-breed replied, significantly. "Wait till the races begin—then you can show him your heels."

The dandy-bully growlingly suffered himself to be pulled away by the half-breed, although it was much against his will. The cool stranger was the first man in the town of Bummer's Bend, who had ever "sassed" him and lived to tell it, and he was enraged.

In the meantime the spectators were gathered in crowds at the scene of the coming races, and preparations were nearing completion.

Carpenters had erected a temporary judge's stand beside the track; also another similar stand upon a larger scale, for the accommoda-

tion of General Howard's party, which consisted of the general, in person—a portly, gray-haired and bearded gentleman of perhaps five and sixty years, with a pleasant countenance and a genial bearing that could but impress one in his favor; his stately daughter Evelyn, just rising one and twenty, and the acknowledged belle of the town and the town's society; Sir Ashley Crawford, an English tourist, who was the general's guest, and several of the "toned" ladies and gentlemen of Bummer's Bend.

The judges' stand contained three horse experts named Redney, Dobleau, and Watson.

At one o'clock the call-bell rung, the course was cleared of people, and a dozen horses galloped down before the judges' stand, each mounted by a rider. Among the most conspicuous was Dandy Dell, mounted upon a handsome bay mare, which was Evelyn Howard's noted racer, Flying Star.

A beautiful specimen of the equine race the bay certainly was, and fully as proud appearing as the cold haughty mistress who sat upon the stand with a confident smile upon her face.

"Order!" yelled stalwart Joe Redney, from the judges' stand. "The race to-day will be for a purse of twelve thousand dollars, there being twelve entries. The winner will receive seven thousand dollars, the second in the race three thousand, and the third two thousand dollars. Horses entered for the race are as follows: Flying Star, by Miss Evelyn Howard; Nettie, Jr., by Dunk Dalton; Meteor, by Robert Chilton; Powder Face, by Wild Bill; Marion Rocket, by Dave Morris; Lady Slipper, by Mrs. Mackey; Blue Bell, by James Thurman; Firebug, by White Face, the Apache chief; Lightfoot, by old Jeff Potter; Little Lightning, by Kit Callon; Shoo Fly, by Le Vere, and Circus, by Rosebud Rob—twelve in all. The by-laws of the course to govern the race!"

"I object to the last horse mentioned!" Dandy Dell cried, fiercely. "Rosebud Rob is a foreigner, and his horse is a vicious animal, unfit to mingle among good racers. I motion that he be ruled out."

"Ay! rule out the spotted animal, judge!" cried the clear voice of Evelyn Howard. "Do not let him race."

"Sorry, ma'am, but I can't oblige ye," Redney replied. "Rosebud Rob planked his thousand, and I reckon he's a right to go it fer keeps."

"I object. He is not a citizen, and we don't allow none but citizens to compete!" the general's daughter replied, angrily. "Give the man, Rosebud Rob, as you call him, back his money, and rule him out!"

"Excuse me, ma'am!" the strange Sport said, rising in his stirrups, and raising his hat, politely, "but I do not choose to receive the deposit back, nor to withdraw from the race. I acknowledge that I am not a citizen of your estimable town, but I trust that I shall become such, and believe I have a perfect right to race my horse, if I choose to risk my cash!"

"Hurrah! that's ther kind o' logic fer ye!" cried a clear, cool voice, and into the ring rode the eccentric girl dandy, who had lately arrived in the stage.

"I say, give every hog a sup at ther swill,

and don't give it all ter one bloated haristocratic pig. The galoot with ther spotted cayuse, has got as much right ter take a hand as any one else, and here I am, Cinnamon Chip, right down from the roaring regions of Montana, w'at will bet high ther spotted nag takes ther pot!"

All eyes were turned upon the strange Girl Sport, who sat coolly upon her horse, with her hat cocked upon one side of her head, and a cigar between her fingers, as independent and saucy looking as an arab from the streets of the metropolis.

No "slouch" of a character was she, evidently, nor was she afraid to express her opinion of matters in the presence of any crowd.

"Who are you, that you lip in when you ain't concerned?" Dandy Dell cried, savagely, not at all relishing the interference, for he had set his heart upon ruling Rosebud Rob out of the race.

"Who am I?" Cinnamon Chip replied, saucily. "Well, sir, my royal charmer, I just gave you my handle—Cinnamon Chip, at your service, guide, sport, hunter, trapper, miner, and hoss-jockey, all in one, ye perseeve. An' I'll allow thet that 'ar Sport wi' ther waxed mustache and the spotted hoss, hes got a perfect right ter take a hand in this race, and I'll go any galoot ten to one thet he rakes the board, too—by a large majority."

"The spotted horse shall not race!" Miss Howard cried, angrily. "If it is allowed in the race, I will withdraw my horse."

"Can't help it, ma'am!" Redney replied. "Business is bizness, and as we judges own this course, I opine we've the right to do as we please. You can withdraw your horse, but not your deposit!"

"This is a shame—an outrage!" the beauty of the fort cried, her face very red with mortification, that her will should be opposed. "It is too bad!"

And the ladies in her box of course felt compelled to echo her sentiments, as they belonged to her set.

"It is precisely right, Evelyn!" old General Howard said, in his blunt but honest way. "You are a little too fast, my dear—this is a free-to-all race, and the gentleman on the spotted animal has equal rights with the rest."

"Gentleman!" Miss Howard exclaimed, with a sneer. "Indeed, you must have very poor taste, to call that strolling vagabond a gentleman."

Rosebud Rob heard the thrust, but did not reply, although his face flushed and an angry glitter crept into his brown eyes.

He was well aware that the general's daughter would try to crush him, and he resolved to hold his own.

Many a woman had he known, but none had ever taken up arms against him as Miss Howard now had done.

There seemed to be a divided opinion in the crowd of spectators, whether it would be right to allow the Sport to compete or not.

Many were in favor of honoring the will of the proud Miss Evelyn, while others were admirers of the Sport, and decided for him.

"There seems but one way to satisfactorily

settle this matter, ladies and gentlemen," cried Captain Mayburn, the blonde stranger, as he stepped forward, followed by his Celestial companion, Pigtail Pete. "The house appears to be divided, and the only way to decide the matter is to take a vote. Those in favor of submitting to Miss Howard's will, will make their decision manifest by saying 'Nay!'"

"Nay!" came the response of a limited number, feminine voices noticeably predominating.

"Contrary—'Ay!'" cried Mayburn.

"Ay! Ay!" roared a chorus of many voices, heartily, in ten-fold greater numerical count.

"Ay! Hip! hip! hooray! That's ther talk. Ther owner of the spotted nag has his rights, an' I can lick any galoot as durst oppose him! be it a king or a queen, a jack or an ace. Oh! I'm your customer, I am, when you got my Irish up, and don't ye doubt it. Mebbe I don't look quite so savage as a bar'l o' cattymounts or a lucivee, but ef ye think I'm a calendar saint, wi' no bed-rock, or no sand, just cum up and say you're itchin' to slide ag'inst a fu'st-class 'arthquake, and you'll find me thar! Mebbe I ain't a ginerals darter, ner a band-box bologna, but ye can't play no gum games whar I'm around, onless ye want ter hear a report from a new country."

"Oh, you're a blow, you are!" Dandy Dell growled, savagely, "an' ef it wasn't that ye're a woman, I'd slap your mouth to a peak!"

"Whoop! hurra! Slap my mouth, would you—slap my mouth, ef it warn't fer my bein' a gal! Ha! ha! ha! Gal or no gal, you couldn't slap one side of my fodder-trap, you lantern-jawed son of a Greaser!" Chip cried, fearlessly.

"Order!" roared Joe Redney, from the judges' stand. "The Sport with the spotted horse shall race with the rest. Get ready for the start!"

At the word there was a general spurring of the animals to the third quarter-post, from which to get a start.

Dandy Dell led the advance, upon Miss Evelyn's handsome mare, with Rosebud Bob, upon the spotted animal, bringing up the rear.

On reaching the quarter-post all horses were wheeled around, and came galloping down toward the judges' stand, abreast.

Dandy Dell however had the inside track, and had managed to crowd the Sport outside.

Rosebud Rob, however, with his imperturbable coolness, only smiled, and held his animal with a slack rein. As he approached the stands, he saw a gleam of hatred in Miss Howard's eyes, and acting on the impulse of the moment, he touched his hat and bowed, mockingly.

The next instant the stentorian voice of Joe Redney sung out:

"Go!"

And the twelve animals shot out from opposite the grand stand, nearly abreast.

The race had begun!

CHAPTER III.

ROSEBUD ROB'S CHALLENGE.

AWAY dashed the twelve racers down the stretch, at the top of their speed, the riders plying the whip and spur—all except in the case of Rosebud Rob.

He sat in his saddle, as if rooted there, and gave his spotted beauty the rein without word, spur or whip.

On the first quarter the spotted horse dropped behind, several lengths, while Dandy Dell spurred ahead about the same distance, he having the inside track, and the bay mare doing handsomely.

"Hurrah! the little bay is going home, triumphant!" Evelyn Howard cried, excitedly, while her friends cheered vociferously. "On—on! Flying Star! Show your heels to them!"

"It do look uncommon like as if the Sport's a thousan' out," Cinnamon Chip said, turning to Captain Mayburn, who stood near by.

"I took more stock in the ar' spotted cayuse than in any ther rest o' the nags, but I reckon I got fooled fer once."

"By no means," Mayburn replied, with a smile. "That Sport is only playing off now. When they are about far enough ahead of him, I opine you'll see gravel fly."

"Ha, ha! what will you bet?" Evelyn Howard cried, sarcastically, for the speakers were standing immediately in front of her stand.

"If you've so much confidence in the vagabond's animal, back it up with a little of your spare cash. I'll bet you a thousand dollars that Flying Star wins first money."

"You'll have to excuse me, miss, for I never make it a point to bet with a woman or take an unfair advantage of the weaker sex, which I would be doing by betting with you, for I am certain that Rosebud Rob's horse will win," Mayburn said.

"Bah! you are a coward, that you are afraid to bet on a certainty, then!" the belle of Bummer's Bend cried, with a perceptible angry sneer.

"A coward is, who coward calls, I have always heard, madam," the ranger captain replied, with scorn expressed in his tone.

Then they all turned to watch the race.

The main body of the horses had just passed the quarter-pole—Rosebud Rob was just passing it, the last of the whole lot.

Evident it was that he was not trying hard to win, and sundry exclamations of disappointment were heard among the audience.

In the spotted horse many had centered their expectations, and not a few their wagers, and from all appearances they were going to lose, for the horse of Evelyn Howard was at least six lengths ahead, flying toward the half-mile pole.

White Face, the Apache, came next behind Dandy Dell, and then the others were strung along about a half-length apart, with Circus, the spotted horse, bringing up the rear, full five lengths behind.

"Et's good-by, Susan Jane, fer ther Sport!" Cinnamon Chip cried, disappointedly. "I took the rooster ter be sum on his muscle, fer he hed concentrated lightnin' in his eye, but I reckon I made a misjibe in takin' his perzact inventory, an' as fer thet pesky cayuse, he's as deceivin' as false teeth in a screechin' lucivee, shoot me ef he ain't."

"Don't get discouraged, my friend," Captain Mayburn cried, excitedly. "Just look at the spotted nag, now, will ye! I'll bet with any man that Circus comes home first!"

But, just then, no one appeared possessed of any desire to bet against the Sport's animal, for Circus had suddenly stretched his neck out nearly on a level with his back, and was flying over the ground at a rate of speed simply incredible. One after another of the horses he passed, like a flash, and he and Flying Star passed the half-mile pole abreast.

But the next instant he shot on ahead, amid deafening cheers from the majority of the spectators, for such beautiful work had never before been performed upon the course at Bummer's Bend within the recollection of the oldest inhabitant.

As he darted past Dandy Dell, Rosebud heard a spiteful crack as of a whiplash, and felt a stinging sensation in his left arm, but supposing he had been struck by Guthrie's whip, he paid no attention to the sting, until he heard a second crack, and a bullet whizzed unpleasantly near his cheek.

Turning, he saw Dandy Dell just returning a pistol to his belt, a malignant expression of hatred upon his dark, evil face.

Without pausing to glance at his wounded arm, Rosebud Rob urged on his flying animal, by an occasional word, and amid thunders of deafening applause, he passed the judges' stand fully an eighth of a mile ahead of the field! and indisputably won the race in a fair and square manner.

Cheer after cheer went up, and loudest of all were the plaudits of Cinnamon Chip, and the ranger captain, Jack Mayburn.

Evelyn Howard stood partly leaning from her stand, with a face that was white with passion, and eyes that gleamed with terrible rage. Plain it was that the defeat of her horse had been to her a heavy blow.

Nor was her hitherto noted mare destined to win any of the laurels, for Wild Bill Marion's horse came in for second money, and White Face, the Apache, spurred ahead of Dandy Dell when within a rod of the goal, and passed the last pole in time to take last purse.

"Hip! hip! hooray! Anything to beat the gineral's darter, even if it is an Apash nigger!" cried Cinnamon Chip, as she took her hat from her curly head and waved it in the air. "I told ye ther Sport would come to his oats, all hunkidori, fer I see'd it in his optic, an' don't ye fergit it!"

"It is an outrage and an indignity!" Miss Howard cried, angrily. "Mr. Guthrie, send Flying Star home at once, and have him well cared for. It is the last time that he shall ever race again."

"I will take him and see to him myself, Miss Evelyn," Dandy Dell replied, bowing. "It was not the fault of the horse that he did not win, and he shall be well cared for. I will oversee it myself."

"Hold on, my friend, if you please," Rosebud Rob exclaimed, riding his horse suddenly across the other's path as he was about to depart. "I've got a bone to pick with a chap of about your size, if I know myself, and I opine there is no time like the present."

Guthrie's face suddenly glowed with anger, but he made no attempt to draw a weapon, for

he saw that the Sport's right hand already rested upon a revolver-butt.

"Well, what d'ye want?" he growled, gruffly. "Spit it out, for I'm in a hurry!"

"Oh, you are, eh?" and a cynical smile lurked around Rosebud's mouth. "Perhaps if you had been in a little more of a hurry, you might have won the race. But that is neither here nor there. You deliberately shot at me after I had passed you out yonder, and one bullet took effect in my left arm. Now, I don't allow that it hurts a man to be playful occasionally, but I do know that I don't allow a man to make me his target, and therefore I presume you know that you've got to give me satisfaction!"

"Satisfaction be hanged! I did not fire to hit you, but to scare your horse so that he would throw you off," the mayor retorted.

"The excuse is no better than the intention, and if you are willing, we can settle the matter in short order. Either rifle, knife, pistol or fist will suit me, and so I give you your choice."

"That's ther talk fer ye—that's ther cud fer ye to chaw on, you son of a Greaser!" Cinnamon Chip shouted, in delight.

"That Sport ain't no slouch, an' I know'd it frum ther minit I popped my eyes onter him. Jest look at him, will ye, an' ef ye don't allow he's a paragon o' perfection, I'll b'y ther bug-juice. I could hug him myself, ef et warn't unmaidenly and unbecoming of a gal o' my good looks an' character. An' as fer thet black, swarthy cuss w'at rid ther bay mare—as fer him, ef et warn't fer ther trouble o' gittin' off from my hoss, I'd annihilate him in two jerks of a donkey's narrative. Oh, ye needn't grin, you doubting pilgrims, fer I c'u'd do the leetle transaction, wi' ther greatest o' ease, an' not half try. Oh! I'm a North American tearer, I am, and don't ye doubt it. Mabbe I don't look as ef I could teetotally demolish several armies, but ef ye don't believe I can fight, just call me a son of a sea-cook, an' see how quick I'll hump my back up, and go fer ye, tooth, tongue and toe-nail!"

"I have no desire to fight," Dandy Dell grunted, for although he was an acknowledged dead shot, he was now chary about encountering this cool dandified sport in mortal combat. Rather would he have waited until he could get him at an unfair advantage—then show his hand. "More, I won't fight. It's against the orders of General Howard, to fight a duel in this town, and I must heed his orders."

"You are a coward, and beneath the notice of a cur!" Rosebud Rob said, contemptuously. "I will let you off, as I always pity any person who is afraid!"

"I am not afraid, but it is against the general's orders," the Dandy protested, looking very sheepish. "Wait until I catch you outside the town limits, and you shall have all the satisfaction you want!"

"I pray that may be very soon," was Rosebud's rejoinder.

"Races over!" shouted Joe Redney, from the judges' stand. "Circus won first money, Wild Bill's nag second money, and White Face third. The stakes will be divided at the Girard to-night. Clear out now, one and all."

The crowd accordingly began to disperse, mainly in the direction of the town, the general

and his suite and an escort of soldiers being the only ones who went toward the fort.

Rosebud Rob rode leisurely toward the town, whistling, and appearing perfectly undisturbed although there were many who were excited and enthusiastic over the victory of his spotted racer.

No horse had these Bendites and wild, rude Arizonians ever seen that could equal the Sport's cayuse, and many admiring glances did the victorious animal receive.

"I suppose he is not for sale, eh?" Captain Mayburn inquired, as Rosebud Rob dismounted before the Girard, and gave Circus into charge of the hostler.

"Not for all the gold in these regions, sir," the Sport replied, with a quiet smile. "The horse, I might say, is a part of my being, and to part with him, would be to lose the most valued of all my present possessions."

"He is indeed a noble animal, and was well ridden," Mayburn replied, as he turned away, and sauntered down the street.

Rosebud Rob gazed after him, a moment, and then entered the restaurant.

Here he dined, and then sauntered into the gambling apartment to look on, for, although no gamester by profession, he knew what a good game was, and took pleasure in watching the ever-changing tide of fortune.

The first person he encountered, on entering, was the Girl Guide, Cinnamon Chip—the eccentric creature in male attire, whose beauty of face and form attracted universal admiration, but whom no man seemed desirous of offending.

In those far-away mining regions, such women as "wear the breeches," are generally set down as tough customers to handle, especially where they carry weapons, as did the Girl Guide.

She looked up, and smiled in recognition, as she saw Rosebud Rob, and put out a hand that was as fair, and as soft as velvet.

"Shake, partner, for I reckon you are the very galoot I am glad to see!" she said, her eyes dancing merrily. "It just did me proud, to see you scoot away from thet gineral's darter's nag, it did, you bet, an' I opine thar wasn't many who wasn't glad you won."

"Think so? Well, I don't know, I am sure. I saw, however, that my cause had a warm advocate in you."

"You bet yer boots. Ef ever I was glad, it was when I see'd you beat Flyin' Star. I war rather dubious o' you, when I see'd you lagging behind, but when you spurted ahead, sez I to myself, sez I: Chip, my gal, there's a square galoot, half man, an' t'other half distilled lightning, and he's ther chap fer ye to ketch onter for a friend, bein's you're a lone trick in this full deck o' aces. So I made bold to salute ye, jest now, although I never had nary an introduc!"

"Which was perfectly right, if you are in need of a right bower," Rosebud replied, shaking her hand, and then lighting a cigar. "I'm at your disposal for any service you may require, from hanging a road-agent, to scalping an Apache, although I have had more experience in the former than in the latter line of business."

"That's the talk! I know'd you wasn't no

slouch, the minnit I fired a glance at ye, and I reckoned a gal could trust herself with a pard of your caliber, without fear of insult or assault. Mebbe I don't look quite like a fu'st-class angel in these togs, ner my vocabulary ain't quite so polished as a hot-house belle's, but I calculate there's considerable respect and virtue in me, yet, although others might not think it, because I'm a wild oat, and as independent as a hog on ice, an' can take care of number one, every day in the week, and twice on Sunday."

"A wild oat though you may be, I believe you are all right, and can assure you of my friendship to the end," Rosebud Rob said, warmly, although a sudden wave of sadness swept across his handsome face, as he thought of his loved one who reposed down in a golden gulch in the wild Black Hills—poor Baltimore Bess, who in her life and strength, ere the assassin's hand struck her, had been so like this Cinnamon Chip in character and spirit. "I, as well as yourself, count as a stranger in this town, and strangers often make the warmest friends. I suppose you came here to dig for golden nuggets?"

"Nary a time, my Rosebud! no mining on my plate, if I know myself. Just what brought me down to Bummer's Bend is at present a secret, which I must not betray even to you."

"Nor is it required that you should," Rosebud Rob replied. "My mission here is also unknown to any one except myself.—Hello! I wonder what's the rumpus now?"

Something, evidently, for the door had suddenly been thrown open, and a squad of soldiers headed by Dandy Dell Guthrie entered the gaming saloon.

"It's you or me as is wanted, Bobbie!" Cinnamon Chip announced, quickly drawing and cocking her revolvers. "Pull your pill-boxes, pard, and if they give you five wiggles of their lip, let 'em have all they want, right from the muzzle!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAMP AROUND THE BEND—OLD HARDPAN.

THE camp around the Bend, to which the half-breed fellow, Lynx, referred in a previous chapter, was located under the shade of a grove of cottonwoods on the bank of a stream, about half a mile below the Bend, to which the little town nearly extended.

The camp consisted of three tents, and a dozen horses and pack-mules that were tethered out to graze.

Looking in upon the camp, the night after the races, one would have beheld quite a little crowd assembled around the brightly burning fire in front of the tents—men who looked rough and used to life upon the prairies, but who were, at a glance, a strangely assorted lot.

The captain of the band, Blonde Jack Mayburn, lay outstretched upon the grass, with his elbow and hand supporting his head as he smoked a finely-wrought meerschaum pipe. A handsome fellow this Mayburn, with his fine form and genial face with its firm but pleasant mouth, its brown sparkling eyes and golden appendages of hair and mustache. And no

man was he, evidently, to brook insult or allow any one to crowd upon him.

Not far from the Captain, the Celestial, Pig-tail Pete, was squatted upon the grass engaged in braiding his cue.

Next to the Chinaman, was a tall, lanky fellow of powerful build, who looked as if he might be able to handle a dozen foes with comparative ease.

He was a plainsman, to 'the core, and boasted not of his many deeds, but was singularly reticent and taciturn. In face he was dark, but not unhandsome, with black eyes, hair and mustache and even teeth of pearly whiteness, which he showed every time he spoke or laughed, which was not often.

This man was familiarly known to the Bummer's Bendites as Wild Bill Marion, the Avenger, from the fact that his chief mission in life seemed to be the wreaking of vengeance upon whatever Indians came in his way.

Years before, it was said, his wife and only child had been massacred by the red-skins, and he had ever since devoted his life to destroying the red-skin savages.

Next to the scout, seated upon a log was a burly German, named Fritz, and a coal-black darky, Jerusalem Grundy by name, both of whom were members of Mayburn's party.

Upon the other side of the captain stood an Arizonian giant, of powerful build, known all through the north and west as Old Hardpan—a great strapping, burly individual, with a head of immense proportion, covered with straggling hair and beard; eyes large and bloodshot, and a mouth of enormous proportions. One peculiarity of his countenance was its marvelous resemblance to that of a bullfrog, the features being noticeably shaped in the same manner, and giving to him an odd and uncouth appearance.

He was dressed in greasy buckskin, with a lacerated slouch hat upon his head, while his weapons consisted of the long-barreled rifle upon which he leaned, and a knife and pair of revolvers in his belt.

Evidently he had just stalked into the camp, for many curious eyes were leveled at him, and Captain Mayburn was saying:

"Take a seat on the ground, stranger, for if you are indeed the redoubtable Hardpan Jeff, of whom I have heard so much, you are the very man I want to see!"

"Waal, pardner, I opine I'll squat, then, fer I'm ther same old pestiverous Old Hardpan, at yer sarvice—

"The tiger cat o' the Golden river
An' fu'st galoot who gold did 'skiver."

And having delivered himself of his little speech, the veteran seated himself upon a log, and proceeded to take an optical inventory of those gathered around the fire:

"Thar's Wild Bill Marion—he's condensed dynamite, when yer tech him off, and ar' a gude galoot ter hev in any party. Then, thar's ther Chinaman! Don't know about him—them durned pigtailed ar' liable ter sp'ile on one's hands. An' as fer ther Dutchman and the nigger, they may be hefty on a fight, but their looks are powerfully against 'em. Waal, waal,

Cap, whar ye aimin' fur, wi' sech a handful o' men, an' ther mountings an' peerairies swarmin' wi' 'Pash an' Mixtures?"

"That is something I don't exactly know myself," Captain Mayburn replied with a musical laugh. "We're bound for somewhere, but just where that somewhere is, I cannot say."

"Great cattymounts! bound fer ther howlin' wilderness, an' don't kno' whar ye're goin'?"

"I guess that's about the size of it," Mayburn replied. "In fact, I reckon we're on a wild-goose chase, unless, perchance, you can enlighten us."

"Great behomaths an' mastadons o' Holy Writ! Ef thar's one man can onlighten ye, I'm the very roseate-tinted gourd, right up from the Milky river—ther prickly cactus fresh from ther plains o' New Mexico—ther big-mouthed, melodious bull-frog from ther savanna swamps uv ther Nor'west! Speel out, my Christyun friend, and ef I can't answer ye, I'll dry up, an' say quits, by the great eternal!"

"Well, sir, what brought us up into this God-forsaken region, is substantially as follows: A short time since, an old trapper came to our camp, one night, up Utah way, where we were prospecting, and told us a fabulous yarn about an old ruined Indian town of some extinct race, that was rich with golden treasures, and a wild rugged pile of mountainous rocks, in the center of a haunted lake, surmounted by a temple containing an idol or statue of solid gold, whose eyes were real diamonds of marvelous size, the actual worth of all of which was millions of dollars.

"A love of adventure, and a desire to see this golden curiosity, led us to obtain the directions from the trapper, how to reach the desired goal, and we started. You now find us on our way, but quite as uncertain how to proceed as a man lost upon the Staked Plain."

"And as big a pack o' durned fules as evyer straddled a hoss," Old Hardpan grunted.

"Then you have heard of this ruined citadel and the golden idol?"

"Great cattymounts, yes! I've heerd on't, an' heerd a thousan' different yarns about it!"

"But do you believe that there is any truth in the matter?"

"Heaps on't, stranger. Thar ain't skeercely no doubt that such a place exists, fer et war discovered by Hayden's Explorin' Expedition several years ago, but they war either skeered out, or driven out, nobody seems to know which, an' sence then nobody can find ther place ner reach it in any shape."

"Then attempts have been made to reach it?"

"Yes. More ner a dozen different cusses hev attempted ter reach it, but failed—leastwise they nevyer anteed up ag'in, an' I 'spect they got fastened somehow."

"But will not Professor Hayden, or some of his men, give a clew to this mystery-enshrouded place?"

"Not by a durned sight. They're as close-mouthed about et as a pack o' mules. Ask 'em about et, an' all they'll do is ter grin an' keep their jaws frum waggin'. Nothin' kin ye pump out of them."

"Which is strange," Captain Mayburn said,

"This trapper who informed us claimed to have visited the ruined temple, and viewed the golden idol, but before he could pocket any of the gold, he was seized by invisible hands and blindfolded, after which he was borne through the air in some kind of conveyance, and after a long while found himself standing upon the ground in an open prairie, unable to tell where he was or how he came there. Days of wandering failed to bring him to the 'spirit town,' as he termed it, and besieged by a superstition, he made tracks down to the South, swearing never to set foot in Arizona again."

A grim expression flitted across the face of Old Hardpan, hard to interpret.

"I've heerd orful stories about et—one about a speerit band o' Apache Injuns, headed by a specter red-skin gal, who fight in the air, an' fly about like gennywine angels, tho' they war, more like, flyin' devils."

"Then you have no idea where to find this mysterious place?"

"I reckon thar's nary a mortal in these parts as kin p'int out ther route ter Mount Rosa except one, onless Wild Bill Marion, thar, knows, fer he's scouted heaps further than I."

"I would give a hundred scalps to know how to reach the place," the dark-visaged avenger said, taking his pipe from his mouth long enough to speak.

"Who is this exception you mentioned?" Mayburn asked, eagerly.

"Et's a gal—a wild, devil sort o' a critter who w'ars britches, an' calls herself Cinnamon Chip."

"What! does this strange girl know the route to the ruined city?"

"I reckon she do, fer her father, Old Sandy Barrett war one o' Hayden's party, ther time they found ther place, an' wen he passed in his checks, last winter, he whispered sum secret ter the gal, an' I'll allow et was about the golden idol, fer he p'inted sou'west, an' got excited. I strained my old ears, but c'u'dn't heer one con-sarned word about et."

"This Cinnamon Chip must be enlisted in my service, then," Captain Jack, said, rising. "I will go at once to the town and hunt her up, for I want to start in the morning, if I can in any way secure her services."

"Keerect, an' ef ye hain't no objections, I'll pedestrianize along with you, fer 'twixt you an' me an' ther gooseberry-bush, thet leetle town o' Bummer's Bend wouldn't be a healthy place fer ye ter strike, ef it war known ther bizness w'ich fetches ye inter Arizona."

"And why not?" Mayburn exclaimed, in surprise.

"Oh! I don't 'xactly know why, but I've seen sum mighty s'picious things sence I've been squattin' around Bummer's Bend. Thar's one thing as plain as yer nose, and thet's ter ther effect thet ef ther durned Apash nigger, White Face, wore ter get an inkling whar you're bound fer, ye'd hev his hull band at yer heels, like wassups."

"Then you think White Face knows all about the 'spirit city'?"

"I dunno; but he don't seem delighted ter see anybody steerin' any further inter ther wilderness."

"Well, come along, and we'll go to the Bend, and see what can be done with the Girl Sport, Cinnamon Chip."

The advent of the squad of soldiers into the Girard gambling-saloon, headed as they were by Dandy Dell, who was lieutenant of General Howard's command, in addition to his other positions, caused no little excitement.

Games of all kinds were instantly suspended, and the votaries thereof, as well as the assembled spectators, drew weapons and stood waiting the issue.

In no way or manner were the citizens of the Bend particularly fond of Uncle Sam's boys; then the fact that they were headed by the blustering bully, Dandy Dell, seemed to indicate that there was no uncertain savoring of a row. Especially did the sportive portion of the Bendites dislike Dandy Dell, because he never played but to win, and many a gamester had he cleaned out. Hence the dislike. So that Cinnamon Chip and Rosebud Rob were not the only ones to draw their weapons, on the defensive.

On entering, Dandy Dell took in the situation at a glance, and a dark scowl mantled his forehead.

"Well, sir, what do you want here?" demanded Colonel Dick Douglass, the bluff and portly proprietor of the Girard, as he came in from the hotel to see what was the matter. "What do you mean by bringing those soldiers in here?"

"I reckon I don't have to ask leave to enter here, with the power of the United States," Guthrie replied, insolently. "I ain't going to disturb any of your possessions!"

"No, I'll allow you ain't!" Colonel Dick retorted. "Ner ye ain't going to disturb none o' my patrons, nuther!"

"Kerwhoop! thet's the kind o' talk ter come frum a Christyun!" cried Cinnamon Chip, enthusiastically. "Spit it right out to the black son of a Greaser, cornel, rite frum ther elbow, an' ef he gives you any o' his lip, smack him one on the mug, for me!"

"What do you want here, Guthrie?" the proprietor demanded again.

"Well, sir, it won't take long to tell ye that," the bully replied. "I've cum fer that pair of precious rascals over there—he that calls himself Rosebud Rob, and the girl, Cinnamon Chip!"

"But what authority have you for wanting them, sir? I generally protect my patrons, unless I find them crim'nal."

"I have an arrest-order from General Howard for both, on the charge of having used ungentlemanly and unladylike language to his daughter, and otherwise insulting her. It is my orders, sir, to bring them to the fort."

"Ho! ho! d'ye heer thet, Sport?" Cinnamon Chip cried, turning to Rosebud; "d'ye heer what that Shanghai rooster wi' the hoss's mane on his upper jaw said? Darn my buttons, ef I ain't five kind o' notions to climb him and sculp him right where he stands! The idea o' us insultin' thet gal o' ther general's, the sassy, good-for-nothing hussy! Ef it warn't thet funeral expenses war so high in this yere country, I'd

waltz right over to ther fort and shoot her fer a yelpin' coyote."

"I rather reckon Mr. Guthrie has undertaken something utterly impossible for him to perform," the Sport replied, coolly. "We did not insult the general's daughter, as can easily be proven, and I shall not submit to arrest."

"Oh, ye won't, eh?" Dandy Dell growled, fiercely. "We'll see about that. I reckon my hand contains more aces than yours."

"I care not; if you think you are in good health, you'd better sail right in, and by the time the little transaction is settled, you'll find you need 'spades' more than 'aces.' Come along, I say, if you want to arrest me or this girl—I am all on the *qui vive* to see you do it!"

CHAPTER V.

A LITTLE GAME OF BLUFF—IN BLACK HOLLOW.

So that in the gambling saloon there was a prospect of an approaching affray, for an ordinary spectator would have had no doubt but that the bullying lieutenant-mayor would make a pounce upon the bold Sport with his squad of soldiers.

But cunning as the wolf was the commandant's nephew; he saw that despite his handful of men, the odds were against him, for Rosebud Rob was a host in himself, and then, to all appearances, he was backed, not only by Cinnamon Chip, but by the entire gang of gamblers assembled in the saloon.

"Come along, if I'm the stool-pigeon you're trapping after," Rosebud Rob cried again. "No time like the present to catch on to me, if that is your desire. We'll play snap-and-ketch-em—I'll snap the bullets at ya, an' ye can ketch 'em!"

"Hip! hooray! thet's ther tune fer ye! Ef ye wanter sing, sail right in, an' hum at us in short meter, an' we'll play ye a chorus. Oh, we kin do it, and don't ye doubt it!" chimed in Chip.

"Yes, Guthrie, why don't you sail in?" Colonel Dick, the proprietor, demanded, triumphantly. "There's ample opportunity to show your good will, by making business for an undertaker, now."

"Curse the luck, how am I to enforce the general's orders, if the citizens all turn against me?" the Dandy exclaimed savagely, as he glared around. "Ten ter one ain't ther ticket fer me."

"No, that's true. Unless you can have things all your own way, you crawfish!" was Rosebud's sarcastic reminder. "You can't play that game now, however, my friend. We've got to have a little settlement, because you fired two chunks o' lead at me to-day, an' I opine ther general ain't a-going to boss this leetle job, an' I opine, secondly, thet this leetle scrape can be settled right here, if so be the proprietor hasn't no objections."

"None at all," Colonel Dick replied, "providin' ye'll mop up all the gore spilt an' carry out ver own corpses, when ye git through."

"I'll see to that, unless I get tapped over the head," Sport replied. "Come, Sir Dandy, nominate your choice of weapons, so that we can get to work."

"Yes, speel out yer caliber, and jack up yer courage!" Cinnamon Chip cried, fairly dancing at the prospect of a row. "Don't git weak in ther knees, ner pale under the gills, ef ye are goin' ter do mortal combat wi' ther Sport, fer he's condensed nitro-glycerine, an' ef ye go ter foolin' around, fu'st ye know he'll explode, out an' out, an' ye'll find yerself ten thousand miles frum nowhere."

"Shet up, curse you!" Guthrie growled. "I didn't come here to fight a duel, but to obey the general's orders."

"Then why don't you obey 'em?" the proprietor of the Girard demanded.

"Because taere appears to be too heavy a hand against my deck. Pull off your pack of gamblers, and I'll soon show you how quick I'll take the precious pair."

"Gentlemen," Rosebud Rob said, turning to those of the gamblers and spectators who had drawn weapons, "please put up your pill-boxes and carvers, and give this rooster a chance to back his crowing. I'll dare—yes, double dare him to wade in now with his whole parcel of soldiers!"

And each with a pair of serviceable revolvers in hands, the Sport and Cinnamon Chip stood waiting for the issue.

But still the "mayor" hesitated.

No dainty job did he esteem it to take the plucky couple, whose coolness evidenced the fact that they were ready and willing to fight.

"You'd better surrender!" he blustered, "for I don't want ter hurt ye, but shell have to, unless you throw down your shootin'-irons."

"That's precisely what we're waiting for you to do," Rosebud Rob retorted; "but there's a fair prospect that our patience will be exhausted."

"I reckon you're right. I've struck ye from ther wrong quarter, and will pass, this time," the dandy bully owned up. "But, look out fer me the next time—I'll catch you on the foul, then."

"And get bounced out on the first base," Cinnamon Chip rejoined, as with his "guard" of soldiers Guthrie turned, and filed out of the saloon. "Oh! you are a valiant hero, you are, Dandy Dell, but I can lick ye quicker than a billy goat can wiggle his narrative, and don't ye doubt it!"

Clearly defeated was the general's nephew, and cursing in no elegant way, he betook himself from the town, and across the prairie to the fort, which consisted of a block-house, and a number of smaller shanties in which the soldiers were quartered. The block-house was two and a half stories in hight, and the whole mass of buildings were inclosed by a high slab fence.

In the second story of the block-house were the reception-rooms and dwelling-apartments of General Howard and his daughter, and they were furnished in rather elegant style for being so far from the bounds of civilization.

To the parlor of the suit, Adelbert Guthrie took himself, on his arrival at the fort, and found Miss Evelyn pacing to and fro, impatiently.

"Well?" she demanded, looking up, expectantly.

"I couldn't fetch 'em!" he replied, sourly. "The whole gang of gamblers in the town drew weapons on his side."

"Bah! did you not have the soldiers?"

"Even so, but I was outnumbered, and I did not dare to lead the general's command into a battle of my own ordering."

"Pooh! you are a coward, Dell Guthrie. Now if they are still at large, what is going to be done?"

"That is for you to say. Nothing can be done with either the Sport or the girl, by attacking them openly. We shall have to nab them un-awares."

"Did you send Lynx to learn the mission of the blonde-haired stranger in this region?"

"I did, but he is not returned."

"Probably he is having difficulty in finding out what he is after. The blonde stranger is not here without an object, and that object is to find Mount Rosa, and the golden idol. There is but one person in Bummer's Bend who can lead the trail to it, and that person is the female who calls herself Cinnamon Chip!"

"Ah! I see, now, then, why your enmity for the girl," Guthrie replied. "She is a dangerous party to have around."

"Very true, and she must be gotten rid of as soon as possible, although I do not know just how. She is not alone dangerous because of what she knows of the Mt. Rosa business, but there is some other secret connecting her with our family. Did you not notice how the general was agitated when he saw her, down at the races? He turned as pale as a sheet, and trembled. I asked him what was the matter, but he refused to tell me. But, I am sure there is some important secret that threatens me."

"Ah! perhaps your position as General Howard's daughter, may be usurped—or, perhaps, a wife may step in ahead of you in his affections," Guthrie suggested, with a villainous smile. "What then, *ma belle*?"

"War!" Miss Evelyn said, with sudden fierceness. "No woman shall step in ahead of me. Ever since I can remember, I have been the general's daughter, and for a number of years, I have held the key to his money safe."

"You hold it, now?"

"No. He demanded the key a half an hour since—a thing he has not done before in ten years; and a circumstance which leads me to believe that something unusual is on foot."

"If this Girl Sport should step in between you and the general's affection and money, where is my loose cash to come from?" Guthrie demanded, anxiously.

"She shall step out faster than she steps in, mark my word for it!" the proud beauty of the fort declared, her eyes blazing with dangerous light. "No woman shall supplant me, while there are ways to remove intruders!"

"Royally spoken, my fair cousin; and, by the way, is not the day growing nigh, when I am to be made the happiest of men, by having the legal right to support and protect you?"

"Ha! ha! You'd make a famous supporter and protector, when even now you have to depend upon me for your spare cash. I will, however, keep your case in mind, and if I do

not get a better offer, you may be the lucky man."

"I'll plant the man that dares to make you a better offer," the villainous lover said, with a grimace. "Now, about these enemies—the Sport and the girl? What are you going to do?"

"Nothing, personally. It is you who must put the girl out of the way and give the Sport a thrashing for having the audacity to enter the race against my will. The spotted horse, too, must be secured, for it is a superb animal, and I would possess it at any cost."

"You would not dare be seen in possession of it here?"

"Oh, no! It must be spirited away, until the Sport leaves."

"Will you be out, to-night?"

"Certainly, unless the general detains me too late in nursing his troublesome gout. I have one man to see, and think you know who I mean?"

"White Face?"

"Yes. I want you to return to the Bend, and if you can find him, direct him to meet me at Black Hollow when the moon is a half-hour up. Do you understand?"

"Certainly, my fair cousin. It remains for me then, to chastise the Sport, and put the Girl Sport where the daisies grow?"

"Yes. I would like to know the secret between her and the general, but suppose it is useless to try to find out. But by all means take care that she does not get an interview with the blonde captain of the rangers, for if so be he is in search of Mount Rosa, and finds out that the girl knows the route, he will be sure to engage her as guide."

"Very well. As soon as it comes night, I'll go to the town, and do your errand. But first of all, I must have a little money to defray expenses."

"I haven't a cent, and the general has the keys to his safe. You will have to do without."

"Ah! but I won't!" Guthrie declared, bluntly. "You've either got to come down to the tune of a hundred or so, or straight to the general do I go, and tell him something that will surprise him!"

"No, no!" Evelyn said, quickly her face growing ashen-hued, "not that. I have a few dollars, and you shall have that."

She took a purse from her pocket, and extracted a roll of bills, which Guthrie received with evident satisfaction.

"I knew you were lying," he said, as he arose and bowed himself out.

A hard expression came upon Evelyn Howard's face after he had gone.

"Curse him! I believe he would give me away, but for my feeding him on money. Ugh! I shudder at the thought of the consequences, should I be exposed. And, yet, it works so slow—no apparent assurance of its ever consummating the desired purpose. I would I had employed some surer and more rapid agency. I am playing a desperate game, and playing to win, but if I fail—but, bah! I will not fail. I will win, for the train must sooner or later reach the magazine. Then, all my long

scheming will be successfully at an end, and—as for marrying Adelbert Guthrie—there are surer and quicker ways to decide for him. As for the bold thing who calls herself Cinnamon Chip, if Guthrie does not settle her hash, I will do it myself, and attend to the cool Sport and the blonde-haired captain, afterward!"

And the general's daughter laughed bitterly, as she surveyed herself in a mirror.

Beautiful was she, but very evil at heart—a belle of the Bummer's Bend's first society, and yet a very wolf—the disguise of a lamb—a woman, whose evil passions, unchecked as they were—might work many a person ill.

A couple of miles north of Bummer's Bend the prairie broke from its level course into a series of undulations and hollows, one of which was deep and ravine-like, with rocky walls on either side, and a pebbly bottom over which water sometimes flowed in the wet seasons.

A prairie fire had licked the place and smoked its steep walls at no distant day, and hence its appellation of Black Hollow.

It was a spookerish place in the day, to say nothing about the night; yet it was often the camping-place of bands of vagabond Indians and horse-thieves, who dared not expose their camp-fires upon the prairies near the fort.

About the same hour that Captain Mayburn and Old Hardpan started from their camp for the Bend, a single horseman entered the Black Hollow from its mouth, and rode carefully into the dark depths.

The full moon just peeping up over the eastern horizon, in a measure lit the way; but then his horse seemed familiar with the path, and made no objection to the spookish place.

The rider was closely wrapped in a blanket, but the feathers which ornamented his scalp-lock proclaimed him an Indian. And had a person seen his face they would have recognized him as White Face, the Apache.

Not far into the Hollow did the chief ride before he drew rein and looked cautiously around him. Evidently seeing no one, he wheeled his horse facing the direction from which he had come, and then both horse and rider remained motionless, making a weird, uncanny spectacle, as revealed in the moon's full rays.

For some time all was silent, and then a horse's feet resounded upon the pebbly bottom and a woman rode up to where the Apache chief was standing—not Miss Evelyn Howard, evidently, but a strange-looking Indian maiden, whose features were darker than those of the Apache—a dusky creature with dark eyes and hair, clad in a semi-male hunting suit of purest white, with a white cloak around her shoulders, and no covering to her head.

She drew rein when the horse was close beside the Apache, who sat stoically in his saddle, and peered inquiringly into his face.

"Is this White Face, the great chief of the Northern Apaches?" she asked, in pure English.

"I am White Face," was the answer. "Who is the Indian maiden?"

"I am White Fawn, the Spirit Rider of the Flying Indians!" the maiden replied, at which a startled yell pealed from White Face's lips,

CHAPTER VI.

A THIEF "PLANT."

AFTER leaving the camp, Jack Mayburn and Old Hardpan trudged rapidly toward the Bend, through the early moonlight of the evening.

A walker was the big Arizonian, as the captain soon found out, for he was often obliged to trot to catch up with him.

"Yes, thet Cinnamon Chip ar' a gal an' a half," the old scout replied, in answer to some previous question of the captain. "She's clear condensed dynamite, mixed up wi' a little nitro-glycerine, and sum giant powder, an' when ye tech her off, she scatters things, I kin tell ye, amazin'ly. Fer instance, I see'd her walk inter a saloon up in Montana, a few months ago, an' salivate two toughs wi' an' ounce o' lead apiece, all because they'd bin sayin' unprenny things ag'in' her honor. Oh! she corned them galoots down fine, an' then she coolly turned an' invited ther crowd ter ther same picnic, ef they war etchin' fer etarnity."

"Wonderful. I have reason to believe she is the very person I want to guide my party," Mayburn said. "Have you any idea that she will go, Hardpan?"

"Dunno 'bout that," the big Arizonian answered, thoughtfully. "P'r'aps ye might catch on ter her, ef so be she ain't gone an' tuk thet Sport, Rosebud Rob, in fer a life partner. She war keepin' cluss ter him a spell ago, in town, an' I 'spect she is struck after him."

"Humph! If it comes to that I'll take 'em both along. The Sport is no slouch."

"Right ar' ye. Thet Rosebud Bob ain't no galoot, nary a time, an' ye'll do well to remember it. He hain't got quite so much wild devil in him, since he lost his gal, Bess, down in the Hills, but he's got enough bonus fer a hull regiment, now."

"This Bess—was she his daughter?"

"Nary a time! She war sum sech a character as Cinnamon Chip an' I reckon she an' the Sport w'u'd have got j'ined, only fer her recent death."

"This Cinnamon Chip—is she of good parentage?"

"Waal, neow, I reckon, I do. Thar's ther old man war one o' ther best trappers on ther frontier, an' a good guide, too. Ther old woman died, years ago, an' I never see'd her but I've heerd it allowed thet she war a good old critter. An' when ye cum ter Chip, ye'll find her squar' an' honorable, even if she is a leetle rough and wild."

By this time they had reached the edge of the town, and passing along down the main street, they soon came to the gambling saloon connected with the Girard house.

"I guess we'd better look in, here?" Mayburn said, leading the way. "Such characters as Rosebud Rob may be found, 'most any time, in such a place as this—not necessarily because they are gamblers, but because they constitute a part of the wild, ever-moving people."

And the captain was not mistaken, in his expectation.

Both Chip and Rosebud were inside—seated at a small deal table engaged at a social game of poker.

At the sight of Old Hardpan, Chip sprung

to her feet and grasped his extended horny hand, with an exclamation of joy.

"Kerwhoop! may I be everlastingly hugged to death wi' grizzly b'ars, ef et ain't the snorting yowlin' hippopotamus o' ther Nor'west!" she cried, joyfully. "Rosebud, my cherub, let me interdooce ye to one o' the toughest old blisters in Christiandom, whose handle is Old Hardpan, Bed Rock, or any other pet attachment you can scare up in an old spellin'-book!"

Rosebud Rob acknowledged the introduction by shaking hands, and also nodding to Mayburn.

"You old night-bloomin' serious, how do you do?" Chip continued, effusively, putting out her foot and tripping Old Hardpan into a chair. "I never was half so tickled to see any one in my life, hanged ef I was. Why, I could jest almost eat ye. How, and whence, and wherefore, cometh you down into this unhealthy region?"

"Chip, my blushin' hollyhock, I slid down on ther lower jaw ov an equator!" the scout responded, with a chuckle. "And what may you be doin', a-playin' keards wi' another pilgrim?"

"Oh, I've doubled up wi' this Rosebud, 'cuse he's distilled lightning, and thar's nary a man in town as durst tech him. He an' I hev sworn eternal constancy an' friendship—thet is, ef one gits inter a fight, t'other 'un pans out an' shows his hand on the defensive; an' then, ye see, Hardpan, I'm sorter mashed on ther handsome Sport, an' 'spect sum day ter be invited ter sheer his joys an' sorrows."

And the eccentric Girl Sport flashed Rosebud Rob a quizzical glance, a smile playing about her pretty mouth.

"Waal, Chip, mebbe you've struck ther right lead, my gal, but thet ain't naryther heer ner thar, I opine. This yere cinnamon-haired galoot here, whose name is Cap. Mayburn, wants ter engage ye as guide ter an explorin' party, an' I'll remark thet ther same capt'n is a squar' galoot, an' as good as they manyfacter. So ef ye can strike a bargain wi' him, kerect!"

"Well, I opine we can talk biz!" Chip assented, lighting a cigarette, and thrusting her hands into her pockets. "Where d'ye propose ter perrigrate to, Blondy?"

"I am hunting for the ruined town of some extinct Indian race, which is said to exist in this territory, and to contain rich mines of gold," Mayburn replied, "and having entirely lost my bearings, I am in quest of some person who can guide me thither. Hardpan, here, believed that you could do it, and I came to see if we could strike a bargain."

"I reckon thet won't be much o' a difficulty," Chip replied, thoughtfully, "providin' ye want ter sheer ekally in the spoils, an' take Rosy, here, 'long with me, as we're goin' ter hang out in partnership."

"Certainly. I could work such a man as Rosebud Rob in to good advantage, for I expect we shall have some fighting to do, before we reach our destination."

"Yas, an' heeps an' slathers of et, arter ye git thar," Chip announced. "Rather reckon ye'll come out ther leetle end o' the horn, Blondy, tho' thar won't be no harm tryin'. Nothin' ventured, nothin' gained."

"Have you ever been to this place?" Mayburn asked, eagerly.

"Yas, I reckon I hev," the Girl Guide asserted. "It warn't more'n about a month ago thet my anatomy war cavortin' around, up thar."

"An' ye saw the ruined town on the top of a mount'in w'ich stood in ther center o' a lake?" Old Hardpan demanded, excitedly.

"Yes, I opine I did," and Chip spoke solemnly. "I see'd all that and more too, but jest what, I don't quite know. Thar's a mystery about the place, an' blest ef I can make head ner tail out o' et."

"Did you see the golden idol?" Mayburn asked.

"No. I didn't climb ther mounting, nohow. My hair stood on end, wi'out venturin' off from ther lake shore."

"Did you see the Spirit Rider and her band of ghostly Apaches?"

"Yas, an' blazed away at 'em, but couldn't score a hit."

"Now, after all that you have seen, what is your candid summary of the case?"

"Waal, sence ye've asked, an' ye're nearly as good-lookin', and mashable as Rosebud heer, I'll tell you; the stories about the gold in that mount'in I calculate are true. Et has evidently, in some remote age, been an Indian town. for in those long-ago days, the tribes built their homes like the woodchuck, in the ground, instead of on top of it, as is evidenced in this territory by the frequent caves in the mountains. Mount Rosa, as et ar' called, I presume contains a heap o' caves, w'ich war ther village, fer an old tumble-down stone ruins of a temple o' some sort is ther only thing on top o' ther peak, now. As fer ther place bein' inhabited wi' speerits, an' bein' ha'nted wi' spooks an' hobgoblins, hanged ef I quite know what ter say. I see'd sum things enough ter make a Napoleon light-headed, an' I reckon thar's critters hoverin' around ther place, w'at ain't natteral born citizens o' this world."

"My informant told me that he saw spectral Indians flying through the air overhead, and fighting each other, and groaning and screeching enough to scatter one's courage endways," Mayburn said.

"Yas, I see'd ther consarned things which had wings, an' looked as big as giants, an' they were cavortin' thr'u' the air in a way thet made me shiver 'way down ter my boots, although I'll allow I ain't werry cowardly. But I didn't heer no groanin' ner screechin'. But I opine thar's sum queer things thar."

"Strange indeed!" Rosebud Rob said, "and it was for the very purpose of solving the mystery that I came into this country. Ready am I to take a hand in the investigation, as I never saw a ghost bigger than a man's imagination yet. Will you guide us to the haunted city, Chip?"

"I opine yes, Robert, my Rosebud," the Girl Guide replied. "W'a'rsumever ye rotate will I perrigrinate, no matter ef et be inter ther region o' the Nile, or the frozen region o' North Pole-dom. An' ef ye're afther wrasslin' wi' ghosts an' sich like, set me down fer an old-fashion side-holt!"

"Then I can depend upon you both, can I?" Mayburn asked.

"Yes. How soon will you start?"

"Early in the morning, if possible. I want night to find me many miles on my journey, to-morrow."

"Very well, I for one will be with you early to-morrow, and as for Chip, she will probably be on hand, as she is the the guide to our fates and fortunes," Rosebud said, with a smile.

"Yes, you bet yer boots Cinnamon Chip will be on deck reddy fer a ginnywine circus. Hardpan, you old night-bloomin' serious, are we to be favored wi' yer company?"

"Thet's perzactly w'at yer 'umble sarvent don't know, Chip. I don't know as ther captain kerries sech breed o' animals along wi' his show or not. My bullfrog bazzoo, howsumever, I allow might skeer off sum o' ther ghosts."

"Of course I count you in," Mayburn declared, slapping the giant upon the shoulder heartily. "My expedition would not be complete without you. I will accordingly count you all in for an early start for Mount Rosa in the morning."

Then, accompanied by Old Hardpan, Captain Mayburn took his departure and went back to his camp around the Bend.

Rosebud Rob and Cinnamon Chip then finished their game, after which they separated for the night, the girl guide going to a room she had engaged in the hotel, and Rosebud going out upon the street, and around to the stables in the rear of the hotel.

It was his custom to take a look at his horse nightly before retiring, to see that it had been well cared for and was all safe.

But to-night, as he approached the stables, he thought he heard a restless movement among the animals, and a moment later he discovered that the door leading into the stables was partly ajar.

"Hello! I wonder who's in there?" was his first muttered exclamation resulting from the discovery. "I don't believe it's any of the hostlers, this time of night. I reckon it won't do any harm to investigate, anyhow."

And drawing a revolver in either hand, he stepped into a shadow, to wait and listen, for he was satisfied some strange person was among the horses.

For some time he heard the uneasy movement among the animals, as if they were afraid of something, and then came to the Sport's ears sounds of murmuring voices.

Evidently there were two persons in the stable instead of one.

With the untiring patience of a sleuth, Rosebud waited and watched, and finally was rewarded by seeing the door cautiously open.

Then a man stepped out of doors and peered cautiously around.

Seeing no one, evidently he addressed a few words to some one within the stable, and a moment later a second individual rode from the stable on a horse, and the horse none other than the Sport's own spotted animal, Circus.

A whistle of amazement escaped Rosebud's lips, but it did not happen to reach the ears of the two horse-thieves—for he had no difficulty in recognizing them as the bully of the town,

Dandy Dell, and his half-breed companion, Lynx.

Evidently it was their purpose to steal the Sport's noble racer, and run him off on the sly, where he could never be found.

"I guess the course is all clear," Dandy Dell said, addressing the half-breed, as he glanced sharply around to see if by any chance an observer was in the neighborhood.

"Be careful in going down the street, and if you encounter any sign of trouble, jest let the beast out. Go ahead, now, and when you have corraled the animal, return here."

"Hold on! don't be so fast about getting off with my horse, if you please!" Rosebud Rob cried, stepping suddenly forward, and covering the two villains simultaneously with his revolvers. "I rather reckon I'll take a hand in this little game, and turn a couple of trumps at least!"

Guthrie uttered a frightful oath, and the half-breed whipped a pistol from his belt. But it was an unlucky move for him. For a shot from the Sport's left-hand pistol suddenly caused him to throw up his hands, and tumble from his saddle with a fierce death-yell.

"Mebbe you'd better follow his example!" Rosebud Rob said, turning coolly to Guthrie. "I can accommodate you, if you like, and save your neck from Lynch's noose!"

"Cuss ye, no! I'll pass!" the bully cried, and making a sudden bound that the Sport had not been looking for, he cleared the nearest fence and darted away across the prairie.

Once! twice! thrice the Sport's pistol spoke in a deadly voice, and each time Guthrie flinched, but he finally got out of range and made for the fort at the top of his speed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPORT'S WONDERFUL DREAM.

THE Sport had scarcely ceased firing when Colonel Dick, the proprietor of the Girard, and several others made their appearance upon the scene.

"Hello!" the colonel exclaimed, seeing the Sport, the spotted horse, and the stiffening half-breed. "What kind of a circus are you having out here, Bob?"

"Oh, I've been trying my hand on horse-thieves," Rosebud replied, "whom I caught in the act of appropriating my cayuse. There's one of the results, and yonder goes another toward the fort at the top of his speed, who, if you follow him up, you'll find to be your estimable townsman, Dandy Dell."

"The deuce you say! And these two worthies were in the act of running off with your horse, eh?"

"I opine they were, and as I have no mercy for a horse-thief, I just relieved the half-breed, and—let the other cuss git away, with several ounces of lead in his system."

"Good boy! The only fault is that you didn't drop the dandy, too."

"Sorry myself that I couldn't have completed the job," Rosebud Rob returned. "But, as I am going to take a skull down to the fort and back yet to-night, I may have an opportunity."

"All right; and ef ye get in trouble down there, jest give a Comanche screech, and ther hull town will come to your rescue!" bluff, big-hearted Colonel Dick said.

Rosebud Rob sprung upon his horse, which was saddled and bridled, and dashed away out of the town and down toward the fort.

Dandy Dell had by this time reached it, and was nowhere to be seen.

On arriving at the gate, the Sport encountered a guard, who leveled bayonet, and demanded to know what was wanted.

"You open the gate and get out of the way, or I'll durned soon inform you," and Rosebud drew a revolver. "I want to see the general, and the healthiest thing you can do is to show him to me."

"Can't see him," the guard replied. "He is in his room, nursing his gout, an' won't be disturbed. Won't the lieutenant do?"

"No, sir, the lieutenant won't do. I just saw him several better than he wanted. Open them gates, I say, and take me to the door of the general's room—I'll do the rest. And mind you, see that my horse is ready for me, when I come out again."

A gleaming six-shooter in the hand of a cool man is often a great inducement, and the guard felt that the best thing for him to do was to obey.

So he threw open the gates, and led the way into the court-yard.

Here Rosebud Rob dismounted, and they both entered the fort.

Ascending a flight of stairs, to the second story, the guard showed him the room occupied by the general, and then took his departure.

Trying the door, Rosebud found it unlocked, and entered without ceremony.

The general was in an easy-chair, with his corpulent limbs resting upon another chair, and was engaged in smoking and reading. But he looked up in evident great surprise as Rosebud Rob entered.

"Pray sit still and do not be alarmed," the Sport said, reassuringly, as he coolly helped himself to a seat, and lit a cigar. "I just dropped in to have a little chat with you, concerning your own welfare. I perceive you are suffering from the affliction commonly called gout."

"I am, sir, very true. I have been annoyed and troubled with it for over three months."

"As I supposed. Now, General Howard, I do not suppose you put any faith in dreams—there is not one in a hundred that does. Still, I have had a very remarkable dream concerning you, and if you will but give me your kind attention, I will relate it to you, as I believe you will be interested."

"Go on, sir. Although the matter of dreams is the least of my troubles, I will listen to you."

"Then I will proceed. To introduce myself, my name is Robert Mapleton, but for short, I am called Rosebud Rob. My business is to rove around, and observe things, generally, and when I can expose a crime or bring a criminal to justice, I generally make it a point to do so. A couple of nights since, while camped upon the prairie, a matter of forty miles from here, I had the very singular dream which I am about to relate. In listening to

my recital, you will please bear in mind that at the time of the dream, I had never heard of you, and only knew this fort had existence, by hearsay.

"The first part of my dream opened in this fort, and in this very room, which, strange as it may seem, had the same appearance in my dream as now. You were reclining upon yonder couch, reading, when a young lady entered, robed in a riding-habit, and presented you with a box of cigars. You accepted them, with thanks, and then the lady retired to another room. In my dream, curiosity impelled me to follow her.

"In the next room she met a man, who looked at her inquiringly.

"Oh! it's all right,' the lady said, with an evil laugh; 'he accepted the cigars, and was highly pleased. The case is progressing finely.'

"The general has no suspicion that it is not gout that is troubling him, then?' the man asked.

"Certainly not. The doctor has assured him that it is gout, and he believes it. Indeed, it has every resemblance to gout, and will continue to have, until he has finished smoking the fourth box of cigars, when there will be a change; his whole body will swell rapidly, and he will bloat up until there will be a closing of the windpipe, and he can no longer breathe!

"It is a hellish way of getting rid of a person,' the man said, with a shudder.

"But safe and sure,' the young woman replied. 'Once the general begins to bloat no medical power on earth can save him, as his system will be too full of the deadly poison inhaled from the cigars. The man who furnished me with the poison, was a German chemist, under whose tutelage I was placed, in New Orleans.'

"Has the general made his will?' the man asked, eagerly.

"Yes, long ago, and our only hope is to keep in his graces, so that he will not change it,' was the reply.

"Then it was, General Howard, that I awoke, with the likenesses of yourself and that other man and woman engraven upon my memory. Now, sir, what do you think of it?"

"My God, man, this is the most astounding thing I ever listened to!" the general gasped, leaning forward, his face colorless, and eyes bearing a wild, frightened expression. "Are you a human being, or are you some infernal thing in the guise of a man, come here to torture me with this frightful story?"

"I have never had reason to believe that I am other than a mortal of flesh and blood, the same as other pilgrims on this earth," Rosebud Rob replied, with a smile.

"And you tell me that you dreamed what you have just related, and that you had never heard my name or seen me, at the time of the dream sir?"

"Exactly. After the dream, I was so impressed with its vividness, that I inquired the way to the fort, and to-day, at the races, you may imagine my astonishment to see the three characters of my dream in flesh and blood, and you one of them. On hearing your name, and that you were afflicted with gout, I was still

further impressed, and finally, but a short time ago, I resolved to pay you a visit, and here I am!"

The general leaned back in his chair, and breathed heavily, his eyes glaring at the Sport, in an awful manner.

"I—I dare not ask you the names of this woman and man?" he gasped, trembling.

"I knew no names, in my dream, but when I saw the same faces, here at the races, I took pains to inquire. Your name, I found to be General Howard. The woman's name is *Evelyn Howard*—the man is called Dandy Dell!" Rosebud said, calmly.

The general bowed his head and groaned aloud, at the announcement. Evidently he had been expecting it. After a while he looked up, a haggard expression upon his face.

"My God! it is terrible. And to you, young man, I believe I owe my life!" he said, slowly, as if in extreme agony.

"Then my dream has been an actual reality?" the Sport demanded.

"Only too true, sir. The commencement of my gout-like affliction dates back to a few days after my daughter presented me with a box of fine cigars which she had purchased in New Orleans, on her return from school. They were choice ones, and as I am a great lover of the weed, I soon had them all smoked, and requested Evelyn to write for some more, which she did. It was when I was midway in the first box of cigars that I felt the initial commencement of what I have supposed to be gout, and what the fort surgeon has assured me was gout. Since then I have smoked two more boxes, and the gout has increased; and now, I am on the fourth box, and—"

"Accordingly, you are upon the verge of the grave!" Rosebud Rob declared. "How many have you smoked out of the fourth box?"

"Only a half-dozen."

"Then by stopping immediately, there may be some hopes of your life. But, by all means, beware of what you eat, drink or smoke hereafter. The lady I know nothing about, but the man, Dandy Dell, is a thoroughbred villain. Only to-night I caught him and his associate, the half-breed, in the act of stealing and running off my horse. I dropped the half-breed on the spot, but the Dandy got off with a few bullet-wounds."

"Did the rascal come here?"

"In this direction, sir."

"Very well. I will see to his case directly. And as for you, Mr. Mapleton, if you will name a compensation for your trouble, I will gladly honor it, besides being forever indebted to you in gratitude."

"Ha, ha! you don't know me, I reckon, general," the Sport replied, laughingly. "I don't dream such dreams for money, but for the sake of humanity. Keep your money; I don't want it. Your gratitude will be ten times more valuable to me. And now, having done my errand, I will go."

"Not until you have promised to come again, and share the hospitality of my quarters, where you will ever be welcome," the general said, warmly grasping Rosebud by the hand. "Your strange revelation caused me to regard you as

a modern prophet, with the power of a true seer."

"I shall be happy to look in upon you again, on my return from a trip to Mount Rosa," Rob replied, cordially. "And in the mean time, look out for this daughter and nephew of yours, for they certainly mean you ill."

"I will do so, you may be assured," the general replied.

And then, shaking hands again, Rosebud Rob took his departure, feeling sure that he had made at least one friend in Bummer's Bend, in addition to saving one life.

And after the Sport had gone, General Howard sat in his chair, a stern expression upon his face.

"I am in the light now," he muttered, in a husky voice; "but for the Sport I should soon be beyond human aid. Curse thee, Evelyn—curse thee, Adelbert Guthrie! I am armed now, and methinks you shall find it out, to your very cost!"

A startled yell it was that pealed from the Apache's lips, and one fraught with terror.

Evidently the White Fawn was a creature whom he held in greatest awe, for he trembled like an aspen.

"Let the White Face fear not," the maiden made haste to say, on perceiving the chief's horror, "for the White Fawn comes not as a foe but as a friend, from the Happy Hunting Grounds. She has sought for White Face because he is a mighty chief, and has many brave warriors at his command."

The chief brightened a little at this, although he still regarded the White Rider with fear.

"The White Face has many warriors," he replied, proudly. "What would the Spirit Maiden have?"

"Much. White Fawn is the queen of the Phantom Apaches, who hover about the ancient Indian city of Mount Rosa. Has not White Face heard of the place?"

"Ay! White Face has seen the mountain in Spirit Lake, but the Great Council Chief told him not to approach near, lest the rocks should suddenly turn into a destroying army of devils, who would sweep White Face from the land!"

"White Face did well to heed the advice of the Great Council Chief," the maiden replied.

"But White Fawn has come to the White Face in trouble. Strangers are about to invade the domains of the White Fawn, and steal the precious gold that the Council Chief, Manitou, planted there. These strangers are several in number, and their scalps are ripe for plucking. But White Fawn's spirit warriors want no scalps, and their thirst for blood is, for the time being, quenched. Therefore, White Fawn comes to her Apache brother of the flesh and blood, and beseeches him to take the war-path against the pale-face strangers who would commit sacrilege in the land of the White Fawn."

"White Face has heard," the Apache replied, "and he will do his best to please the White Fawn. Let her point out the invaders, and my warriors shall immediately go upon the war-path against them."

"It is well, and White Fawn is pleased. When White Face comes again to Spirit lake,

he shall be received with all honors. The pale-faces whom White Fawn would have scalped, are those around the Bend. Does the White Face know?"

"White Face knows where!" the chief replied. Then White Fawn turned her horse, and rode rapidly out of Black Hollow.

CHAPTER VIII.

EN ROUTE—SOME BIG COUNTS—A CAPTURE.

BEFORE day-dawn on the morning succeeding the night of which we have been writing, Dandy Dell met Miss Evelyn Howard near the outskirts of the town. She was mounted upon her bay mare, and was enveloped in a rubber coat.

"I have been looking for you," the Dandy said, motioning for her to stop. "Everything has gone contrary and against us."

"What do you mean?" the general's daughter demanded. "What ails you?"—for Guthrie's left arm was bandaged up, he limped in one leg, and wore another bandage across his forehead.

"Oh! I've got pretty badly bruised up," he growled. "Lynx and I attempted to capture the spotted horse, when Rosebud Rob came suddenly upon us with twenty or thirty men, and we had to fight for it. I dropped six, right hand running, and then got off with the damage you see."

"What became of Lynx?"

"He dropped at first fire."

"And you didn't get the horse?"

"Of course not. One man could not very well take it away from a score."

"Not such a man as you, probably," Miss Howard replied, with a sneer. "What else has happened?"

"Something that will prevent your return to the fort, I calculate," the Dandy announced. "The general has got his eyes open, and don't take any more stock in imported Havanas."

"The devil!" was the woman's ejaculation.

"Yes—the cat's entirely out of the bag," Guthrie replied. "The Sport, Rosebud Rob, has just been to see the general, and has told a strange dream he pretends to have had, the result of which was that you and I were engaged in trying to poison the old man by giving him poisoned cigars."

"And the old fool believes him?"

"Of course; and the hang of it is the cursed Sport described the present and future symptoms of the case exactly as you described them to me."

A low, fierce curse escaped the woman's lips. Her face grew stern and almost hideous in its expression.

"Curse them both!" she gritted between her clinched white teeth. "I am foiled in the one thing, but they shall not cheat me in the rest. I'll have old Howard's gold, even if not by actual inheritance. I'll steal it!"

"Bravo! You talk like a martyr! I admire your pluck, and if you want to go halves with me, I'll be with you."

"Of course—but not now. We must bide our time. In the meanwhile, we must prevent the Mayburn party from reaching Mount Rosa."

"How?"

"By playing the part we so well know how to play. We must balk and foil these curiosity-

seekers at every turn. Come! There is no time to be lost."

"Right you are, for they will pull up stakes at daylight and take the trail, having secured the services of Cinnamon Chip and Rosebud Rob to go with them."

"Curse you, Dell Guthrie! I ordered you not to let the Girl Guide and Mayburn meet."

"I know you did, fair cousin, but I was unable to obey your mandate, inasmuch as they held a larger hand of cocked sixes than I did. But never fear. We can make them sick ere they're half-way to Mount Rosa. Eh, *ma belle Evelyn*?"

"We can try—must try!" the general's daughter replied, with a fierce, set look in her face that boded ill to her enemies.

The first streak of day-dawn in the east revealed an active bustle in the camp around the Bend, and by the time the sun loomed up over the horizon, like a ball of molten fire, the tents had disappeared and the saddles were filled, and pack-horses loaded with the paraphernalia. Among those in the saddles, most conspicuous for her bright loveliness and a queer character, was Cinnamon Chip. She seemed in her element, mounted upon a fine horse which Captain Mayburn had provided for her, and her merry laugh rung clear and musical upon the bracing morning air.

Of the others mounted were Captain Mayburn, Old Hardpan, and the Dutchman, negro, Chinaman, and Wild Bill Marion.

Rosebud Rob had not yet made his appearance, and it was for his coming that the party waited.

"I cannot see what detained him, for my part," Mayburn said, impatiently. "Unless he shows up pretty quick, I shall start on."

"Whar fer?" Chip demanded.

"For Mount Rosa, and the golden idol."

"Then, ye'll perrigrinate wi'out me, an' don't ye doubt it!" the Girl Guide said, evidently in dead earnest.

"And why so?"

"Beca'se I don't make nary an yearthly pilgrimage, wi'out thet fragrant blossom, Rosebud Rob."

"Pshaw! Am I to be detained, on account of him?"

"I re'kon ye air, ef ther old court knows herself. Cinnamon Chip am I, right up frum ther Black Hills, an' I do sw'ar an' asseverate thet I won't budge a ha'r's-breadth, until Rosebud ar' wi' ther gang. Ef ye opine ye kin find Mount Rosa 'thout me, jest sail right on, an' I'll anchor, heer, until my pardner shows up. What d'ye say?"

"Hold! yender cums ther Sport, now!" Old Hardpan announced, pointing toward the Bend, where a horseman had just come into sight.

"Keerect! thet's ther sweet-pertater o' my life, sure pop. Forward march! strike fer ther town, an' then I'll lead off, wi' two aces an' a pack o' knaves!" Cinnamon Chip shouted.

And accordingly the cavalcade swept away toward Bummer's Bend, making rather an imposing spectacle, as they spurred along over the level prairie.

They soon met Rosebud Rob, who wheeled his horse, and joined in with them.

Then straight up through the main street of Bummer's Bend they dashed two abreast, and on out of the town to the northward.

As soon as they left the town, Cinnamon Chip took the lead, and they pressed on into mid-prairie.

Even as a floor stretched out the vast expanse of prairie land before them, and with the bright, warm sunshine showering down, the scene was one most beautiful.

Chip kept a short distance in advance of the rest, and thus they rode on until the sun was at its noonday hight, when a blast from Captain Mayburn's bugle ordered a noonday halt.

This was made on mid-prairie long enough for a general feed of of horses and men.

"How many days are we from our destination, lady?" Mayburn asked, as he finished nibbling at his dried buffalo-meat. "This country is so fair that I really could wish that the journey was a long one."

"Oh! you'll get enough of it, before you sight Mount Rosa," Chip reassured. "Ef ye don't, set me down as a first-class beat. 'Twixt now an' to-morrow night thar'll be heaps of music in these yere lattytudes."

"Music?"

"Yes, music. Ye'll heer all sorts o' tunes, sech as 'Put me in my little bed,' an' 'See't my grave's kept green,' ter be sung wi' Apash accompaniment."

"Apache?"

"Waal, I reckon. Apash abound up on these prairies, thicker'n fleas on a red dorg. Th' Hardpan, you old blister-plaster—ain't thet so?"

"Yes, Chip, my hollyhock; Apash ar' exceedin' spry up hayabouts, durn my old frog-bazzoo, ef they ain't. Seen as menny as fifty thousan' of 'em at one time, all performin' a war-dance."

"Git out! Fo'suah, dat's no circumstance. While you'se drawin' de long bow, why not make a big one!" exclaimed the darky.

"Yes; thet's the ticket," captain Mayburn cried; "let every man, woman and child do something in the way of a yarn, to digest the meal. For instance, let's all give a truthful statement of just how many of the red Bedouins of the West we've slain, single-handed, in one day. I think some of the gang can contribute some pretty big figures. For myself, I have killed and scalped six of the heathens in one day, single-handed, and alone."

"Pshaw! dat's nuffin. I'se killed as high as thirteen, an' it wasn't much of a day for Injines, neither," exclaimed the darky.

"Well, that is a fair day's work, I should say, Jerusalem. Dutch, how much can you raise him?"

"Oh! I haff kill so high as fifdeen in vone hour und dree quarters, und perried 'em all mit der ground!" the German replied, swelling with importance.

"Worse and worse. Hardpan, you are the biggest liar in the crowd—what can you do for us?"

"Ef ye want ter know of one solid day's work of ther great frog-faced bazzoo o' ther Nor'west, jest thar am I. Et's an actooal fact, b'yees, wi'out any veriation frum ther scrip-

tooral truth, thot I hev started sixty red heathen on their speeritual pilgrimage, in one day!"

"You pass, don't you, Chip?" the captain said, turning to the Girl Guide.

"Yes—I won't take the cake away from Hardpan," was the laughing reply.

"How about you, Rosebud?"

"I, too, pass; never indulged any higher than one," the Sport admitted.

"Well, I guess Hardpan is bound to have the pan," the captain decided with a smile, "unless, mayhap, Wild Bill or Pigtail Pete, here, can do something for us. What do you say, Pete?"

"Me no killee Injun," the Celestial responded with a dubious shake of his head. "Me no killee Injun—run muchee fastee from Injun, allee samee."

"Well, well, I guess it is left to Marion to cap the climax, yet," Mayburn averred. "Come, Bill—tell us your best day's average."

"No! no!" the Avenger exclaimed, a gloomy expression flitting across his swarthy face—"I never counted the number, for fear of being struck blind."

A shudder seemed to run through the frames of the listeners—there was something horrible in the meaning of the words, and none who had ever heard of Wild Bill Marion could doubt that he had killed and scalped more Indians than any other man on the border.

A silence of several minutes was finally broken by Captain Mayburn. "You spoke of Apaches, Chip," he said, turning to the Girl Guide. "When, and where do you expect we shall encounter them?"

"Most anywheres, 'twixt here and Mount Rosa," was the reply. "Ef ye see 'em at all, it will be on horseback, an' about fifty milyun on 'em at that."

"Then we must watch sharp, every man, and prevent a surprise, which would surely cripple us," the captain warned.

After the horses had grazed for an hour or more, a mount was ordered, and the cavalcade of adventurers was soon dashing away over the prairie, due north, Cinnamon riding in advance with the grace of a gazelle.

No halt was made until sunset, when they sighted a small prairie motte, and aimed for it, as a camping spot.

On arrival, they found that the timber covered less than half an acre, and was watered by a little prairie stream, making it a choice spot for a camp.

"Good place for a camp—darned likely place fer Apash," Wild Bill Marion cautioned, when they had dismounted and struck camp.

"Yes, an' ef we don't see a red sun afore mornin', set me down fer a candidate fer next President," Chip asserted in all earnestness.

To which Old Hardpan nodded his head, assentingly.

Indeed, it seemed a prevalent expectation among the adventurers that there would be trouble with the reds, before morning.

The camp was pitched in the northern edge of the motte, and two tents erected—one for the Girl Guide, and the other for the male portion of the company.

After a supper had been prepared and dispatched, Chip said:

"Mebbe you're boss of this expedition, cap'tin, but I opine ef ye don't want them yaller locks o' yourn hangin' to an Apash lance, afore mornin', ye'd better put out some pickets or guards, to prevent ther consarned Injuns frum crawlin' over us, when we're wras'lin' wi' Morpheus."

"Yes, a guard will have to be stationed," Mayburn replied—"two of them at that. I do not mean to be surprised, if I can help it."

Accordingly the Dutchman and the negro were sent on duty for the first half of the night, to be relieved at midnight by the scout, Wild Bill, and Rosebud Rob.

The remainder of the party immediately sought rest and repose, well wrapped in their blankets.

But they were not nearly asleep when there was a series of wild yells on the southern side of the motte, and a moment later, just as our party of adventurers had gained their feet, grasped their weapons, and rushed outside the tent, the two guards made their appearance, leading two prisoners, whom they kept in abeyance by the aid of leveled cocked revolvers.

"Yah! yah! we'so got de t'ief dat stole yer onions, massa!" Jerusalem shouted, in delight. "I'so cotched de skunk dat stole yer chickens."

"Yaw! yaw! we haff got so much ash swi pig teefs dot stole away mit yer sauerkraut, py shimminy!" the Dutchman added.

"By Jove, they are white men, instead of Indians," Mayburn cried, as he stepped into the light of the dying camp-fire and surveyed the two prisoners. "Where did you get these chaps, boys?"

"Oh! ve caught hime prowlin' around mit der outside off de grove, unt ve t'ink ash how ve petter capture hime, und bring him mit der camp in, youst fer de shoke of det'ing," the German explained.

CHAPTER IX.

NIGHT VISITANTS.

THE two prisoners were as nearly unlike as the eccentric pair who had captured them, as far as personal appearances went.

The German's captive was an elderly man, with iron-gray hair and bearded face, and had the dress and bearing of a traveling clergyman.

His companion was a younger person, say about six-and-twenty years of age, with an effeminate countenance, shaded darkly; black eyes, closely-cropped brown hair, and a slight mustache.

His dress was of stylish light diagonal cloth, well fitted, and patent-leather slippers fitted to his small feet, and a silk hat upon his head.

Both men carried weapons, and the elder one a rough sachel, which evidently answered to carry the paraphernalia of both.

"Verily, my good man, thou wilt not suffer us to remain in the hands of these rough and lawless men?" the elder prisoner said, turning to Captain Mayburn. "We are shepherds of the Lord's flock, an' cometh into the land of the Philistines to gather around us a fold."

"I reckon, boss, ye've struck ther wrong cli-

mate fer yer partickler biz!" old Hardpan grunted.

"Nary a sheep ner a lamb will ye git in this kentry, onless it be a mountain billy goat, or a yowltin' coyote."

"Nary a lamb!" accorded Cinnamon Chip, leaning upon her rifle.

"I opine, stranger, ye hain't struck a werry saintly crowd."

"Nevertheless we falter not, but plant our platform, and hoist the flag of the righteous on the breeze," the elder prisoner said, solemnly. "Thou art not human if thou wilt not listen to the words of the gospel."

"Mebbe we ain't!" Chip replied, with a low laugh. "Eh? Rosey—my blooming bud, what's your inventory o' thet crowd?"

"I rather suspect that the elder party is a humbug!" Rosebud Rob replied, decidedly. "I don't like the cut of his nib, exactly, but have seen worse-looking clergyman. Say, old Rock of Ages, what's yer introduc?"

"Young man, thy flippant tongue betrays a calloused heart; moreover, thou art a scoffer. As for my name, if that is what you ask, it is the Right Reverend Harvey Hannibal Fish, pastor of the Jerusalem Orthodox Church, at Jerusalem Center, Madison county, Injeanna."

"Whew! and who is the effeminate rooster with the stove-pipe hat, and diagonals?"

"That, sir, is my son, Charles Augustus Fish, presiding elder of the Jerusalem circuit."

"Bet five ter one he can't lick a crippled muskeeter!" Chip wagered. "I say you, Charles Augustus Daisybeau, did ye ever sculp an Apash?"

"The Lawd forbid!" the younger Fish gasped, putting up his hands, in horror. "Compare me not, strange woman, with the Philistines of the wilderness!"

"Keerect! don't mix that galoot wi' our gang o' disciples!" grunted Old Hardpan. "We don't want no craw-Fish pilgrims wi' this command, nohow."

"Gentlemen," Captain Mayburn interposed, scrutinizing the new-comers with a keen gaze, "your coming here is most inopportune, as we are on the eve of an expected battle with the Apache Indians, and must use every precaution. Not knowing who you may be, we must bind you, and hold you as prisoners, until after the fight."

"Thou art over-wise, my friend," the Reverend Harvey Fish replied, piously. "Surely we, the servants of the church, would not seek to bring thee harm!"

"Neither would a coyote chaw terbaccer, ef he didn't get a chance," was Hardpan's suggestion.

"Ner a Greaser steal a horse, if he didn't know how," Chip chimed in.

"You must either submit to be bound, or go whence you came," Mayburn announced.

"If you're clear timber, you won't suffer—if you turn out treacherous we'll most likely hang you to one of these trees. Boys, you may bind them, hand and foot."

Ready hands were there to assist in obeying the captain's order, and in a twinkling both of the stragglers were upon their backs, securely bound,

Jerusalem and the Dutchman were then sent back to their posts, and Wild Bill volunteered to act as guard over the prisoners while the remainder of the party turned in for rest.

And although they retired to their respective tents, they were not allowed to enjoy undisturbed repose, for about midnight the German came rushing into camp, followed closely by the darky.

"Gott in himmel! dar vas so many ash sixteen t'ousandt Injuns out mit der prairie!" he panted gesticulating wildly. "Dey vos comin' straight for dis camp, quicker ash lighdning."

"Yah! yah! dere's a hull regiment of de dirtyimps fo' suah!" Jerusalem averred, wildly.

Wild Bill motioned for them, to be silent, while he listened. It took but a moment for his quick sense of hearing to distinguish a dull thud upon the prairie.

Stepping first to one tent then the other, he shouted the single word; "Injuns!" in a clear ringing voice, and it had the effect to bring the adventurers quickly to their feet.

Out of the tents they came, weapons in hand.

"What is the matter, now!" Mayburn demanded, glancing around.

"Injuns!" Wild Bill replied, laconically. "Listen, if you don't believe it."

They did listen, and heard the jarring noise of horses' hoofs.

"Indians, I guess," Mayburn admitted, "and unless we get to business, we're likely to be in here for some time."

"What are you going to do?" Rosebud Rob asked.

"Fight, of course. You take Cinnamon Chip, Wild Bill, and the Dutchman, and I'll take Hardpan, Jerusalem and Pigtail, and we'll go to the southern side of the motte and meet the cut-throats. If they surround us, string out your men around to the west and north, and I'll meet you from the other way."

"If we can help it, not a red-skin must gain entrance to the motte!"

"I reckon we can fight our share, anyhow!" the Sport replied, confidently.

"On course we can!" Chip assured, with a flourish. "Sech lights as Wild Bill, Rosebud Rob, Fritzzy, heer, an' my humble self, ain't no less'n a hull hoss brigade, when ye git our mad up!"

"Ye ain't no sarcumstance ter ther great disaster composed o' Cap Mayburn, ther great skyrocket, Jerusalem Bundy, ther crape-tinted shadder o' destruckshun, Pigtail Peter, ther roaring equinoxyull thunderstarm o' Chiner, an' Old Hardpan—thet's me—ther great frog-faced prickly cactus-stalk o' ther Peruvian desert."

"Forward march!" Mayburn ordered.

"Hark! don't you hear the devils yell? It's time we were to the front, now!"

A hasty departure for the southern border of the motte, was the next action of Rosebud Rob and Mayburn at the head of their respective bands.

The distance was short, and they soon arrived at the edge of the timber, where a strange and unrelishable scene was presented to their view.

The night was a beautiful one, with a full

moon soaring in the dome of the blue sky, rivaling the brightness of the stars.

Out upon the prairie, about a half a mile from the motte, was a long line of Indian horsemen, just now at a standstill, the moonlight glistening upon their weapons, which consisted of rifles and lances.

A great number of them there were—probably a hundred, all told, and they looked grim and fierce as they beheld the motte.

"What do you suppose is the cause of their halt?" Mayburn asked, stepping through between the trees, to where Rosebud and his party had taken a stand.

"Rather guess they're debating on the feasibility of making an attack, or else they've sent out spies, whose return they are awaiting," the Sport suggested.

"I opine thet the last is about the fit!" Wild Bill said. "Either they're waitin' ter find out our forces, or are layin' sum Injun trap with which to capture us."

"Mebbe my eyes ar' sharpest," Chip cried, suddenly. "Don't ye notice two empty saddles back o' ther main body o' savages?"

"Sure enough, there are two empty saddles; but how do you account for that?" Mayburn queried.

"I'll show you pretty quick, as soon as I find a red nigger's head peepin' out o' the grass," was the reply.

The hint caused the others to watch with more alertness.

If spies were creeping toward the motte through the tall prairie grass, it remained for them to discover and silence them, to insure their own safety.

For an hour they remained silent and watchful, and the line of savages maintained their position, as motionless and grim as though stationary monuments.

But suddenly, when the watching was growing exceedingly monotonous, Cinnamon Chip raised her rifle and fired.

Crack! went the weapon, and a moment later a terrific death-yell was heard, and a savage was seen to spring into the air and fall back, not a hundred yards from the motte.

"Thet's ther way ter pull their eye-teeth, I tell ye!" the girl guide chuckled, replacing a fresh cartridge in the magazine of her handsome Winchester.

"Yes, and you have set the ball a-rolling!" Rosebud Rob replied, pointing toward the main body of savages. "See! here they come, lick-etty scoot!"

It was even so.

No sooner had the death of the spy been announced by his wild yell than a chorus of wilder yells arose from the throats of the halted redskins, and simultaneously they spurred their horses forward toward the motte.

Wildly they rode, a full hundred, making an imposing spectacle, for with military precision they rode abreast.

"Look sharp, now!" Rosebud Rob cried, in a shrill tone. "Fire as soon as you can reach 'em, and don't waste a bullet, or your goose is cooked!"

Every member of the Sport's party grasped

their rifles firmly, and waited for the red Bedouins to come into range.

Not long were they in doing this, and then as if by agreement the eight repeating rifles of the adventurers spoke simultaneously in a volley of death.

The effect was immediately made apparent by eight riderless horses dashing ahead in advance of the main band, and by ear-splitting screeches on the part of the uninjured savages, as they came on.

Again and again did the rifles speak, ten times in succession, and hardly a bullet failed to score a death or a disabling injury.

Three-quarters, at least, of the savage horde had wilted before the terrible fire of the plucky adventurers. The effect upon the rest can better be imagined than described.

Panic-stricken, they wheeled their horses and lashed them back from the hotbed of death, until they were out of rifle-range. Then they halted for an instant to gaze back over the corpse-strewn battle-field, after which they galloped away in a due southerly course.

"That's the end of our danger from those varmints!" Old Hardpan exclaimed, as, with Mayburn and the others of his party he crossed over to where the Sport's party were stationed; "but *didn't* we sock et to them, my geelorious pilgrims? Waal, now, I ruther reckon we did. A st aight hundred ter eight war thar, ef I ain't a liar, an' we jest annihilated 'em till thar warn't skeercely enuff left ter make a decent shadder. Ye did yerselves honor, but greatest of all ther Romans were me, ther Great Frog Face of the North!"

On returning to the camp in the center of the motte, the adventurers were surprised to find that the two stragglers had in some mysterious way cut their bonds and were gone!

How they had made their escape, or where they had gone, was an enigma that investigation failed to solve, and so they soon dropped out of the minds of the party.

A guard was again stationed, but no renewal of the attack occurred, and the adventurers were permitted to sleep undisturbed until morning—all except Cinnamon Chip.

She retired to her tent, and was in a first drowse, when she was suddenly awakened by something cold touching her forehead.

Opening her eyes, she beheld a man in a black cloak and mask bending over her, and perceived that he held the muzzle of a cocked revolver pressed against her cheek.

"Sh!" he cautioned, in a low tone. "Make the least noise and I'll blow your brains out!"

"What do you want?" Chip fearlessly demanded. "I reckon you've got the wrong pig by the ear this time!"

"Oh! no," the stranger answered, softly. "You are Cinnamon Chip. What I want to know of you is: what was your mother's maiden name?"

"I don't know."

"Look out! Don't lie to me or you'll be cheating yourself. Was not her first name Mary?"

"It was!" Chip replied, in astonishment.

"Mary Osborne?"

"I do not know. My mother died when quite young."

"Very well. Keep my visit quiet, and you will see me again. I am trying to aid you in recovering lost rights."

Then turning, suddenly, the masked stranger darted from the tent.

Chip sprung after him, but too late! He had already vanished in the darkness.

Early in the morning a mount was made, and the trail was resumed.

Wild Bill remained behind at the motte, promising to join the cavalcade about noon, which he did.

His remaining behind was a mystery, but all suspected that his object was to obtain and cache the scalps of the slaughtered Apaches.

All day, steadily, the party rode on until, when the sun was setting, Cinnamon Chip uttered an exclamation and pointed ahead:

"Look! look!" she cried; "yonder is Mount Rosa, and Spirit Lake, not a mile away!"

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEARTHLY MYSTERY.

"HURRAH! hurrah! Mount Rosa!" echoed Captain Mayburn, joyfully, swinging his hat in the air.

Far ahead loomed up the long-looked-for sight, a large round mountain, hundreds of feet in height, tapering from a monster rugged base to a narrow peak, which was obscured in a cloud of fog, and the whole rising out of a silvery body of water, to whose very edge the prairie extended. And, most remarkable of all, the prairie encircled around the lake, and stretched on in an unbroken expanse, no other mountain connecting with the natural wonder in Spirit Lake.

"Hayr we ar'!" old Hardpan exclaimed, "wi' in earshot o' ther consarned place, an' now whar's yer speerits an' hoggobblins?"

"You'll see them soon enough!" Cinnamon Chip averred, as they rode on at a gallop toward the goal. "Ye won't git a peep at ther consarned anymiles until it cums night, an' then ef yer ha'r don't stand on end, I'll buy the wet groceries fer ther crowd. Oh! ye needn't grin, an' purtend ye ain't afeard, fer ye'll see sights over yonder thet'll fairly make ye jingle!"

"Well, that is precisely what we are after, I calculate," Mayburn protested. "The more ghosts, the merrier. Where is the best place to camp, Chip?"

"I dunno that, until I explore a little," the Girl Guide answered. "I reckon, tho', thet one place is about as good as t'other."

A short ride brought the party upon the southern shore of the lake, where they were enabled to make closer observations.

The lake from the shore to the mountain was a half a mile wide, and to all appearances very deep. The water was clear as crystal, and fish could be seen swimming around in it in large numbers.

From the base, the mountain rose nearly perpendicularly to an enormous height, the taper so gradual as to scarcely be noticeable, yet narrowing down to less than half the size of the base by

the time it met the fog which enveloped the peak.

"What is the cause of that fog?" Captain Mayburn asked, as he gazed upward. "It appears to hide the peak."

"The cause I ain't enuff o' a philosopher to explain," Chip replied, "but in daytime the fog is allus thar, from sunrise till sunset. That's what makes it so difficult to find Mount Rosa. Ef it warn't fer ther fog ther top o' ther peak could be seen fifty miles away. As it is, a person kin pass wi'in six miles o' heer, wi'out notice-in' ther mountain."

"Thet's a fac'," Old Hardpan affirmed. "Ef it weren't for ther fog, ther peak ked be seen more ner fifty miles away. But I'll be teetotally cussed fer a frog-faced fright, ef I evyer hev see'd a ghost, an' I'm anxious ter git a peep at one o' ther consarned critters."

"Wait!" Chip said, curtly. "I'll bet six aces an' a jack ag'in' the board, thet ye'll see one skeart Hardpan, d'rectly."

A dismount followed, and a reconnoissance was made for a suitable camping spot.

A few rods up the lake-shore the fringe of timber began, but on consultation it was decided not advisable to camp under cover, but to remain upon the open shore, where all was clear, and it was easier to observe what was going on.

The tents were pitched, and the horses staked out, near by, to graze; then several camp-fires were built, and the party were installed in their new camp.

By this time it was growing dusk, and with it the expectations of the adventurers were aroused, for what would be the issue it was hard to conceive.

A close watch was kept upon the mountain and the lake, but no sign of life was seen.

As the sun went down the fog gradually disappeared, and the peak of Mount Rosa became visible, far, far up toward the starlit heavens. Upon the extreme top appeared the ruins of what had evidently been, in some past age, a stone temple—a granite roof supported upon stone pillars. The roof now, however, had partly caved in, and some of the pillars remained standing like grim sentinels, guarding the ruins of the dead city.

Altogether it was an imposing sight, and the eight adventurers sat and viewed it with silent awe, after an evening meal had been prepared and partaken of.

"Cum! cum! I'm waitin' fer ther music ter strike up, so I kin dance wi' a full-blowed speerit!" Old Hardpan said, with a chuckle. "Ef I ain't mistaken, I kin wrassle wi' ther best speerit in thet mountain. I'm a reg'lar hoss fer dancin', an' I'd as lief dance wi' a speerit as ary other mortal, so long as et keeps step."

"Ye won't hev long to wait," Cinnamon Chip answered, keeping her eyes fixed upon the mountain. "The moon's coming up, and I'll allow ye'll see sights pretty quick."

"Correct, and it behooves us all not to get scared at whatever we may see," Captain Mayburn said, earnestly. "I am not superstitious, and I believe that though we may see things that appear unearthly, it is all a humbug, managed by parties that are alive as we ourselves. We have come here to investigate this thing,

and if we calculate to succeed we've got to keep a stiff upper lip, and laugh at all apparent spiritual manifestations."

"That's the ticket exactly!" Rosebud Rob coincided. "It must be a very bad ghost that frightens us away. And I opine there won't be any ghosts walking, to-night, that we can't tickle with a good leaden pellet."

"Shoot me fer a dorg's mother-in-law ef ye skeer this great frog-faced bazzoo," Hardpan grunted.

"Heer too!" Chip accorded. "Mebbe I ain't bigger'n a pint o' hard cider, but I've got grit enuff ter run a steam-engine, when ye git my Irish up, an' don' ye doubt it."

These remarks ended the conversation for over an hour, during which the adventurers all watched and waited with feverish impatience.

The moon rose grandly in the starlit heavens, but soon became obscured in a mass of clouds that rose and rapidly covered the sky, making the night black as Egypt.

"It was on sum sech a night thet I was heer before," Chip observed, "only a little darker, if anything. Ah! did you see thet?"

There was no need to ask—all did see it, and shrunk back a little; a sudden flash of crimson fire seemed to blaze around the top of the peak for an instant, then disappear as quickly and mysteriously as it came.

"Thar! that was the initiatory fireworks!" Chip protested.

"Yes, but there was nothing about it that the ingenuity of man could not invent!" Mayburn reassured. "Thus far— Ah! *thunder!*"

The latter inelegant expression came in a startled manner from the captain's lips, and was echoed in similar cries by the others.

Now they had something of the ghostly order—something too horrible to be anything but supernatural. In the air, not a dozen feet from the captain, apparently, it appeared—the ghastly outline of a phantom face, surrounded by a halo of whitish light—a horrible haggard face with skin drawn tightly over the skull, the eyes sunken and glaring, the mouth stretched in a horrible grin, exposing two rows of fangs frightful to behold.

There in mid-air appeared the awful thing, without visible means of support—a terrible spectacle in the blackness of the night.

Brave man though Captain Jack Mayburn was, he shrunk back with a horrified gasp, and the others were not slow in following his example.

"My God! shoot the thing—it is looking straight at me!" Mayburn cried huskily.

"Cuss me if I won't fix it!" Wild Bill Marion answered, and whipping out his revolver, he sent six bullets speeding in rapid succession at the phantom head.

Throughout all Arizona was he noted as a dead-shot. And yet not a bullet out of the six appeared to take effect, for the apparition remained motionless, the eyes seeming to wink in their sockets.

"Gott in himmel! dat vas der tuyfel!" burst from the lips of Fritz, in groans of terror.

"Much-ee big spook—oh—o—oh!" gasped the Chinaman,

"It's no use, boys; we've got inter a ghost nest, an' we may as well say our catechisms, an' turn up our toes!" whined Old Hardpan.

"Curse the thing! I'll try my hand at it!" Rosebud Rob gritted. "Spook or no spook, I'll perforate it!"

And raising his rifle, he fired seven shots, one after the other at it, in rapid succession.

And the answer—was a wild, shrill laugh, so unearthly in its tenor as to cause the listeners to shudder. And still the terrible face remained stationary. Evidently it was useless to attempt to harm it by all the bullets in Christendom.

"I pass!" Rosebud Rob said. "If any of you will tell me what it is, I'll give it to you."

"I don't want it!" Cinnamon Chip replied.

Evidently she and the Sport were the coolest of the lot.

"Look! look! there it goes, by George!" Mayburn cried, excitedly.

And so it did. All of a sudden it began to recede and die out, until it disappeared entirely from view.

The little party watched it sharply, and when it was gone, there was a general sigh of relief.

"Well, what do you think about ghosts now?" Chip demanded. "Mebbe some o' you galoots kin define thet example we jest see'd?"

"It war a ghost—great yowltin' cattymounts, yes!" Old Hardpan declared, with a knowing nod. "Durn me fer a frog-faced monkey ef et didn't stiffen my old ha'r right up on eend ter luk at ther consarned thing."

"Why didn't ye git up an' waltz with it, old man?" Rosebud Rob asked, with a laugh.

"Waltz wi' thet speerit? Hope I may nevyer pump hash ag'in ef ye ketch this old breezo waltzin' wi' enny sech consarned anymiles."

"What was your opinion, Cap?" the Girl Guide asked, turning to Mayburn.

"I don't know. I reserve my decision, until we see the end of this confounded business."

"And you, Wild Bill?"

"I opine 'twas the devil, minus his horns!" the Avenger assumed.

"Yaw! vaw! It vas der tuyfel!" Fritz coincided. "He vink his eye mit der Chinaman, un' say 'Peder, my poy, better ash how you come mit me, yust once!'"

"Nixy! nixy! muchee no go to debbil!" Pig-tail Pete protested, shaking his head. "Chinaman muchee goodee, allee samee!"

"Oh, yes! yer a double-distilled saint, you air, jest like I'm a fu'st-class beauty," Old Hardpan grunted. "But, I say, pilgrims, what's ter be did? Ye don't purpose ter squat around these unearthly parts any longer, do ye?"

"Certainly we do," Rosebud Rob assured. "We ain't going to be scared away by one ghost, nor a dozen of 'em, but are going to fight it out on this line, if it takes all winter. Eh, Bill?"

"I opine!" the Avenger assented, curtly.

"An' them as wants ter crawfish, can jest git up an' huff et out of camp fer all they're worth!" Chip declared, decisively.

"No crawfish ober dis way!" the darky said.

"Not any for Yarmany!" cried Fritz.

"No muchee crawfish!" announced Pete.

"Who in thunderation wants ter crawfish?"

Old Hardpan growled. "I reckon I hain't as much as sed single fish. Allowin' et be an onhealthy latitude fer saints, I ain't a-goin' ter back, not much for 'Liza Jane. Et would luk nice for me, ter squintepucker, now, wouldn't et? I opine Old Hardpan ar' heer."

"Good! I admire your resolution!" Maynard was pleased to say. "Although what we have just seen was of a nature calculated to arouse a person's superstition, I guess if we git at the bottom of the mystery, we'll find that we've been humbugged by a simple trick."

"Mebbe so, but how d'ye account fer thet speerit in mid-air?" Hardpan demanded.

"I cannot account for it satisfactorily, at present, but hope to ere long. Ah! look! look! we have not seen all!"

The captain pointed up toward the peak of Mount Rosa, and all gazed in the direction indicated.

The sight they saw was not calculated to inspire them with fresh courage.

In the air, about a hundred yards above the peak of the mountain, phantom figures of Apache warriors, seemed engaged in conflict, as revealed in a halo of whitish light that surrounded them and the top of the peak.

A dozen of them there were flying about through the air, without apparent propelling power.

Thin shadowy figures they were, armed with lances, which they darted at each other with apparent fury; the faces were those of brutal-looking savages, and the bodies barren of all raiment except the breech-cloths.

Fiercely waged the contest, each one seeming to fight the other with irresistible fury. For some ten minutes the phantom contest seemed to wage hotly, and the awe-stricken band of adventurers upon the prairie gazed in fascinated wonderment at the unearthly spectacle.

Suddenly a band of white horsemen seemed to rise up from the top of the peak, and approach the fighting phantoms with leveled rifles—a dozen, all told, the horses superb-looking animals, and the riders headless bodies, arrayed in flowing robes of purest white.

A sudden dash there was, and the fighting spirit Apaches vanished; then the spectral horsemen suddenly seemed to change their aim toward the watchers in the valley below.

The next instant there was a sharp rattling report of several rifles, and then came the familiar Teutonic voice, in a despairing cry:

"Gott in himmel! dunder un' plitzen! I vas killed so deader as six t'ousand sardines! Helb! helb! Oh! o-o-oh! I vas killed deader as a her-ring!"

CHAPTER XI.

A HEALTHY GHOST.

"SHUT up, you fool!" Rosebud Rob commanded, sharply. "Do you want to arouse any more of these spectral devils?"

"Oach! dunder unt plitzen! I vas kill, I tell you!" Fritz roared, rolling and kicking about on the ground like a fish out of water. "I vas hit mit more ash sixdeen places!"

"That's nothing; some of the rest are hit, I guess, but don't make such a blasted fuss about it. Shet up, now, or I'll whack you over the

head and finish the job," the Sport threatened. "Hello, pilgrims—any the rest o' ye hurt?"

"I got a slight scratch on the tip of my elbow, just enough to set my crazy bone a-howling!" Mayburn replied, with a grunt.

"And I got pasted one right atween the eyes, but my skull was fortunately so tough thet ther bullet flattened wi'out doin' any material damage!" and Hardpan blew his nose vigorously.

"Hello! Chip, how are you?"

"Oh! I'm all right side up wi' care, Rosy, an' don't ye doubt it. No cabbage-leaf am I ter wilt at sech a fire as thet."

"And you, Wild Bill?"

"I opine I got a small bite on the end o' my nose, jest enough to ruffle the skin!" the Avenger replied, whereupon there was a general laugh. "It ain't o' skercely no account though."

"It's lucky no greater injury was done. When specters ride through the air on white horses, an' plug us wi' solid lead bullets, it's about time to begin swearing," was Rosebud's view of the case.

"Yes. Tork about yer not b'lievin' in speerits an' hobgoblins, gentlemen—what in thunder d'ye say ter w'at we've jest seen?" Hardpan demanded.

"As for me, I don't know what to say," Captain Jack replied, dubiously. "Although I ain't no b'liever in spirits, ghosts, and all that fol-dorol, I'll 'low there's some mighty strange sights been seen here to-night. We all undoubtedly saw the same condemned performances in mid-air, an' ef they wasn't spirits, what in thunder were they?"

"That's just what I'd like to know," Wild Bill added. "Sartinly, humans can't float around through the air, ner hosses tread on it, onless they be lighter-weights than a feather, an' ef they warn't humans they must have been shadders from t'other world, I opine."

"That seems the only reasonable way of viewing the case," Mayburn confessed. "Still, I cannot bring myself to believe that there is such a thing as ghosts."

"On course they war ghosts, an' ef we don't make ourselves skeerce around heer, I opine our carcasses wull be food fer coyotes an' buzzards," old Hardpan put in. "When ghosts ride right thr'u' ther air on hossback, an' fire off their guns like natteral mortals, I opine we ain't got no show at all, an' had better slide out on ther first breeze that comes along."

"Not much, 'Liza Jane! We warn't brought up in ther wood to be skeart out by owls, an' I opine we adhere ter this spot!" Chip said, firmly. "What's a few ounces o' lead, compared wi' millions o' shinin' gold? Ther system thet can't stand a good-sized cannon-ball ain't fit fodder for a decent alligator!"

"Gents, I'm as much for investigating this infernal mystery as any one, but I'm a little afraid we've tackled a job too large for us."

"Maybe so, but I for one am going to stay and see it out, if I lose my scalp!" Rosebud Rob said.

"And here too!" Chip declared. "Wherever ther Poseybud stays will ye find me."

The others did not join in this determination. Evidently they were undecided as to what course to pursue.

The disposition was strong on the part of all save Rosebud Rob and Cinnamon Chip to leave the vicinity of the haunted mountain and lake forever, but their resolution to remain seemed to deter the others from breaking away.

The night wore away without any further spiritual demonstration on the part of the phantoms of the mountain, and the dawn of another day was eagerly welcomed by the little party on the shore.

Breakfast was prepared from a quantity of fish that had been caught from the lake, and after it was partaken of, a general consultation was held in regard to what was best to do.

"For my part, I'd suggest that we get back to Bummer's Bend as soon as practicable," was Captain Jack's idea. "I don't see that we are going to accomplish much staying here, and as for amusement, I am satisfied with what we have recently enjoyed. A little of that same goes a good ways with me."

"Then you, too, are struck with the superstitious fever, eh?" Rosebud asked.

"No, not exactly; but I'll admit that my anti-faith has been a good deal jarred up by what I've seen, and it is all quite beyond my comprehension."

"That may all be so, and it is liable to remain a mystery; and I for one am going to solve it, be it the work of a lifetime. I am not at all terrified by what I have seen, and to root right into the facts of the case is my intention!" this was Rosebud's decision.

"Well, I suppose if you remain, we all will, and I trust to luck. What do you propose? I'll put you in command of the future movements."

"I propose to make an ascent of that mountain to-day. You all can do the same, but must work separate, and climb up from different starting-points. This is necessary; to prevent a fight with our unseen foes. They cannot watch us all, at once, and in this way we can eventually reach the top of the mountain."

It was so decided, and according to Rosebud Rob's orders, the party separated and assumed eight different starting-points for their dangerous undertaking, thus approaching the mountain from as many directions of the compass.

The Sport, Cinnamon Chip and Old Hardpan took respectively the northeastern, northern and northwestern approaches, while Mayburn had the eastern, Wild Bill the southeastern, Fritz the southern, Pigtail the southwestern, and Jerusalem the western.

"Spare no red-skin!" the Sport ordered, as they separated. "If we do, we may as well hang up the fiddle."

"Jest my ijeer perzactly!" Old Hardpan assented. "Wipe out every pesky hornet ye meet, an' then thar'll be plenty ter stock ther market wi'."

Rosebud Rob had taken for himself perhaps the worst route, as the watery body was wider at this point, and once across the water the mountain appeared more steep. But he cared not for this.

In his life of adventure in the wilds he had met with many mountains more inaccessible and had scaled them, sometimes because of a force of unpleasant circumstances over which he had no control.

To get across the water was the first thing to do, and he looked around him in search of some mode of passage. To be sure, he could swim, but this was not desirable if he could discover any other way of getting across, for the water of the lake was icy cold.

Careful search revealed to the Sport that there was only the one way, and he accordingly prepared for his bath.

No man was he to hesitate on trifles, even if they were of good size.

Securing his weapons safely, he plunged resolutely into the water, although the contact caused him to shiver.

He was in hopes that he might be able to walk across, but soon found out different, when a sudden step-off was the means of ducking him in under the waves.

On his return to the surface, he struck out manfully.

Although he expected every minute to be riddled with bullets from the mountain phantoms, he was happily disappointed in this, and gained the shore of the mountain in safety, if a shore it could be designated, as he could barely get foothold.

From the base, nearly perpendicularly rose the pile of mountain rock to a stupendous height, covered only sparsely with shrubs and bushes of a dwarf kind, and, too, there were only occasional chances to gain a foothold.

"The next important thing, is to climb," Rosebud Rob decided, "and, judging from all appearances, a fellow needs to be an adhesive plaster to stick to these rocks. But, I reckon I can go up them, if anybody can, and I may as well commence the circus, first as last, for it's got to be did."

First removing his garments, he wrung the water out of them as best he could, and then donning them again, he began the ascent.

From shrub to crevice he traveled upward, catching onto whatever presented itself, and by it drawing itself on upward.

In this way he worked for several hours, pausing only long enough to get breath. At the end of the third hour he found himself half-way up the mountain-side, and also discovered that he could go no further on his route.

Above him the crevices ceased, and no bushes grew so that there was nothing to cling to in climbing, the rock being smooth and even.

Puzzled was the Sport to know how to proceed, but he finally decided to keep around the mountain to the northern side, and find out how Cinnamon Chip was making it.

Following a narrow projection or ledge, he toiled on, slowly, and in due time arrived upon the northern side, and came to where Chip was resting and eating a lunch of dried deer-meat.

"Hello! what's the matter, now?" she asked, as the Sport approached. "Anybody sick or killed over your way?"

"Oh! no. I can't get any nearer heaven on that route, and thought I'd try your course!" Rosebud replied, with a smile. "How is it?"

"Mighty tough climbin' ef I know myself," the Girl Guide replied, "an' I opine I do. But I guess we can get up, if we hang to it. Heard anything from the rest?"

"No! not a squeak."

After Chip had finished her lunch, they continued up the mountain. It was toilsome work, and they were often obliged to pause and rest, as instead of growing easier, the route appeared to grow steeper and harder of ascent.

"Do you imagine we'll get anything ter repay us for our trouble?"

"Yes," Rosebud asserted. "We will get some experience, if nothing more, and experience, nowadays, is valuable. Besides, I opine we'll unravel the mystery of all this funny business concerning ghosts and spirits. My candid opinion is that these spirits are the humbuggery of a party of consummate rascals who have a secret mine in this mountain and resort to this scheme to scare intruders away."

"But how about ther ghosts? Ye don't calkylate no humans can cavort around in ther air liké thet, do ye?"

"No. There is something about what we saw that I can't understand. I believe, however, that we can satisfactorily solve all to our satisfaction, when we once get at it."

In the mean time Captain Jack was having a little adventure all by himself.

After separating from the others, he swam the lake, and began to climb the mountain.

Not more than half-way up the dizzy declivity did he get, however, when he heard a voice, and saw a woman standing a little above him, holding a revolver leveled at him.

"Stop!" she said, sternly.

And Jack, of course, halted.

The spot upon which he had halted, was a little plateau or ledge, surrounded on three sides by a dwarfed growth of firs. The woman with the revolver stood not over a dozen yards away.

She was attired in a rich Indian costume, was slightly above the average hight of women, and remarkably pretty, although her dusky features were molded after a haughty fashion, and her eyes glittered with a fire of imperiousness.

Somewhere, Captain Jack fancied he had seen this nut-brown maiden before, or some one greatly resembling her; but just where, he could not tell for the life of him.

"Well, miss, I am halted!" he said, raising his hat, politely. "What way can I serve you?"

"Best by remaining where you are for the present!" was the decided reply. "What brings the pale-face in the land of the Apache?"

"Well, miss, I reckon curiosity, as much as anything."

"But does not the pale-face know that he is in the Spirit Land where no living being is permitted to roam?"

"Spirits be hanged! Do you call yourself a spirit?"

"I am White Fawn, the Spirit Queen of Mount Rosa!" was the haughty reply.

"Oh! you are!" Jack said, with a contemplative whistle. "Well, I'll allow you are about the healthiest spirit I ever encountered."

"What does the pale-face mean? There is sarcasm in his words. Does he doubt the words of White Fawn when she says she is a spirit?"

"No, miss, I don't doubt your word, in the least, but I believe you lie!" was the ranger's

blunt declaration. "You might as well try to shake this mountain with an earthquake as to stuff me up with any of your gas about ghosts, and the like."

A strange laugh escaped the maiden's lips.

"Perhaps!" she said. "Anyhow, what brings the pale-face to the forbidden land?"

"As I told you before, curiosity, and also a desire to examine the golden idol!"

"Then, the pale-face has erred. In coming hither, he has placed himself at the mercy of White Fawn. This is her land, and she guards it with fire and steel. No pale-face who comes here, and is captured, ever goes away alive!"

"Oh! they don't eh? Well, then, according to your words, I might as well consider myself a corpse, eh?"

"The pale-face adventurer's life is in White Fawn's hand, and only one thing can save it."

"Well, one chance often turns the game. Speel out, if you've got any prop's."

"White Fawn will not kill the pale-face on one condition—that is, that he will marry her, and with her share the secrets of Mount Rosa. She has taken a fancy to him, and would not kill him, except to guard her secrets. Will the pale-face accept the terms of the White Fawn?"

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

CAPTAIN JACK gave vent to a peculiar whistle of surprise.

Here was wooing impromptu, and under very forcible circumstances. To marry yet awhile, was not in the ranger's calculation, but evident it was, now, that he had only two chances—one for life and the other for death.

In no way was death a welcome visitor, but Jack was puzzled how to avoid it, except by marrying the Indian queen, as she termed herself.

"I reckon, miss, that I ain't in the matrimonial market," Mayburn said, by way of prolonging the interview, in the hope of seeing a corner for escape. "You wouldn't want a man that's got a wife and fifteen children, would you?"

"The White Fawn cares not; she has set her heart upon the pale-face adventurer, and would make him her chief. Come! let him decide at once—promise solemnly to become the husband of White Fawn, and never betray her secrets, or the secrets of this mountain—or, die!"

"Well, I reckon it's Hobson's choice, either way," Jack replied, doggedly, "an' rather than to die, I guess I'll take the worst of two evils."

"You will marry the White Fawn?"

"I opine yes, rather than to shuffle off this mortal coil. Go ahead with your ark, and we will follow."

"Good! Let the pale-face first throw down his weapons, and then follow the White Fawn."

At first Mayburn hesitated about this.

It was his resolve to accompany the Indian maiden to her destination, but about throwing down his weapons and disarming himself was a different thing.

By accompanying the queen he could learn the secret of the mountain; and then run his chances of escape, better than now, when White Fawn covered him with her weapons.

"Why throw away my weapons, if I am to accompany you and enlist in your service?" he argued.

"The pale-face ranger is a great shot, the White Fawn has heard, and she would thoroughly test his faithfulness, before trusting him with weapons in his hands," was the reply. "Let him cast his weapons down, and White Fawn will see that they are secured, to be placed in his hands, at an early day."

"But, how about my companions, who came with me into the Apache country?" Jack demanded, warily.

"The other pale-faces must go back to their lodges!" the maiden said. "They shall receive a message from you, warning them to leave. If they refuse they shall all die."

"Keerect, you hold the biggest number of tricks, and I shall have to submit to your will, I suppose," was the ranger's rejoinder.

Dropping his rifle upon the plateau, he next drew his revolvers, and dropped them, but only one of them reached the ground. The other slipped into the wide top of his cavalry bootleg, and sharp though were the Indian maiden's eyes, she failed to notice the fact.

A clever trick it was—one that the adventurer had performed successfully several times before. Next he cast away his knife, and then turned to his captor.

"There! my weapons are out of my reach—now lead ahead, and I will follow."

"It is well. Let the pale-face follow the White Fawn, and she will conduct him to her lodge."

Jack did follow, and they toiled on up the mountain-side. Tedious was the ascent, but the Spirit Queen held on with light tread, and in due time Jack Mayburn found himself upon the top of Mount Rosa!

Safe and unharmed, and upon the pinnacle of his aspiration.

The top of the mountain was a sort of level table-land, of less than an acre in extent, and in the center stood the ruins of an ancient temple.

Six huge columns of carved stone towered like grim sentinels against the sky, the roof having partly fallen in and been cleared away.

The fog that enveloped the top of the mountain was so dense that Mayburn was unable to see through it to the prairies below.

Eagerly, however, did he use his eyes about him, and with only one result—that of seeing the famed golden idol.

In the center of the temple it stood, upon a small granite base—a small statue, about the size and height of a six-year-old child—a perfectly carved image, to all appearances wrought from a block of solid gold.

Jack gazed at it sharply, and perhaps a little longingly, for if the idol were, as it appeared, of solid gold, he knew that it was worth no insignificant fortune.

But White Fawn interrupted him.

"The pale-face must submit to have his eyes blindfolded," she said, "before going further."

"All right. Anything to suit," Jack assented, allowing her to proceed. "You've got it all your own way."

White Fawn bandaged his eyes so that he could not see; then seizing him by the arm, led him forward. For several steps they proceeded, and then, after a moment's pause, began to descend a stone staircase.

This was to Jack's utter amazement, for he had seen nothing of the kind while on the plateau top, and knew that it must have commenced from there.

Down, step after step they went, seemingly into the bowels of the mountains; then, after a space of five or ten minutes, they stopped descending, and White Fawn led Jack through what he calculated was a passageway.

They presently emerged from the passage into what was evidently a large subterranean chamber, judging by the loud echo of their footsteps.

Here they paused, and the bandage was removed from Jack's eyes.

What he beheld on looking around was in some degree a foretaste of what he had suspected.

The heart of Mount Rosa was a gold mine, and he now stood within it.

The cavern was a huge affair, and had evidently in some distant day been the bed of a volcano, as the rocky sides and the lofty, rugged ceiling had left indications of former lava secretions. The floor or bottom of the cavern was sandy and rugged in spots, and covered an area of ten or twelve acres.

At the further side men were engaged in digging with pick and shovel—men in top-boots, corduroy pants and woolen shirts, who wore black full masks, slouch hats, and were armed to the teeth.

Other portions of the mammoth volcanic cave were used as camping-spots evidently, for there were fire-cranes, skin couches, rude tables and stools, and the general paraphernalia of a camp.

The only light afforded was by a large jet of fire that burned up in the center of the cavern, emanating apparently from a vein of natural gas. In former days this had no doubt been the torch that had supplied the fire to the internal mountain eruption.

"The pale-face is in the Spirit Land of the White Fawn!" the Indian girl said, waving her hand. "He is in the great secret gold-mines of Mount Rosa. Look at me, Captain Mayburn—dost think you have ever seen me before?"

Jack Mayburn did gaze into her face, searchingly, but finally shook his head in a puzzled manner.

"No, I reckon not. There is something familiar in your face, but I cannot recall the place I have ever seen you," he replied.

"Then your memory must be sadly at fault. But, let me tell you, you need not be ashamed of your bride, for as aristocratic blood flows in my veins as in yours. No Indian am I, nor a spirit, as you probably have guessed, and when I first set my eyes on you, I resolved to possess you, for you are the only man my heart has ever warmed toward—the only man I would marry. Look sharp! do you not know me? I am Evelyn Howard, the general's daughter!"

We left Rosebud Rob and Cinnamon Chip still climbing up the mountain.

The ascent was tiresome, and often they were obliged to pause and rest.

In one of these pauses a man came suddenly from the bushes and confronted them.

It took but a glance on the part of either of the adventurers to recognize him as General Howard, of Bummer's Bend.

"Hello!" Rosebud ejaculated. "Who have we here?—General Howard, as I live!"

"Yes, it is I," the officer said, coming nearer. "I saw you coming up the mountain, and waited for you. What brings you here?"

"Well, that's rather a difficult question to answer," the Sport replied. "I should define the case as a dose of curiosity, adulterated with a few grains of adventurous spirit, and a natural desire to harvest gold shekels."

"You think this ghost business is but a blind to cover the secret of a gold-mine, then?"

"Well, yes. I opine that's about the size of it. What, may I ask, brings you so far from the fort?"

"Several causes. I have come here in pursuit of the heartless woman fiend whom I have all along called my daughter."

Rosebud gave vent to a little whistle of surprise.

"She has come here, then?"

"Yes. I have trailed her and her confederate, my nephew, to the edge of this lake, and there lost track of them. Where they have flown to is a mystery I have as yet been unable to solve."

"Perhaps they are some of the ghostly apparitions that haunt this vicinity," the Sport suggested.

"That they are in some way connected with the mystery of this Mount Rosa, I have no doubt," the general averred. "Since I have had my eyes opened, I have learned that many days and nights when I have supposed Evelyn to be safely housed within the fort, she has been absent unknown to me. As I have traced her here, I have no doubt that the wayward child is into deeper villainy than that of which she has been detected."

"From what you say, I should infer that she is not your own child?" Rosebud Rob half queried.

"No, she is not my own child, although I have reared her from early childhood as such. I adopted her from an old hunter who had more little ones than he was able to support."

"Then you have no child of your own, eh?"

"Ay! I trust so, my friend, although I have no definite proof of it. Years ago, I was separated from my wife by foul stories that were circulated against me by an old enemy, who had been my rival in love affairs previous to my marriage. Unfortunately my wife believed the lies, and with our child, then an infant, left my home, and I never could get certain trace of her thereafter, although there came a vague rumor once that she had married an old trapper up in the Nor'west. Of this I could not learn for a certainty, and I have ever regarded my wife as dead. But a few days ago I saw a face in Bummer's Bend that was a duplicate of that of my lost wife, and the sight of it filled me with the belief that in it I saw the face of my child. Nor am I convinced that I am mistaken yet."

"Who was the person, may I inquire, whose appearance so impressed you?" the Sport asked, with interest.

"She is the same young woman who is your companion, here—Cinnamon Chip, I believe she is called," the general said, pointing to the Girl Guide.

Chip gave vent to a little exclamation of surprise.

"You believe me *your* daughter, sir?" she ejaculated, her face flushing with pleasure.

"I candidly do, although you are a wild, untrained blossom, grown up in a desert wild," the general said, calmly. "Your features bear a striking resemblance to those of my long-lost wife, and something seems to tell me that I am not amiss in my belief that you are my little Eva, who was ruthlessly snatched from my arms, seventeen years ago."

"Waal, now, this *gets* me, like a brick, blamed if it don't!" the Girl Guide exclaimed. "I calculate you be the same snoozer who visited me in the prairie camp a couple of nights ago, then?"

"I am the same."

"I tho't so. S'posin' I am your darter—are ye goin' ter hitch onter me as relations, install me as queen o' aces at the fort, an' h'ist out thet other gal who's been fillin' the gap?"

"Of course. If your identity can be proven, as my daughter, you shall be recognized as such by me, with a joyful heart," the general replied, earnestly.

"Well, I propose we drum up the affair at once!" Chip said, with a smiling face. "I ain't no objections ter claimin' you as a parent, 'cause I've allus reckoned I were from purty fine stock, an' that would go ter prove the conclusion. But thar's one thing which, ef I'm made out yer daughter, thet ye've got to promise, afore I'll recog'yer claims."

"I presume so," the general said, smiling. "Name it, please."

"Well, ye've got ter agree ter take in ther Sport, here, too. You see we collided up at the Bend, and yoked up as sorter pards in this trip, an' I'll allow ef I go over ter ther fort to queen it, Rosey, here, must king it, ter make things balance. Thar's no tellin', you know, if things jibe karect, but what we may eventually yoke up fer good."

"See here, I reckon you're rushing things a little," Rosebud Rob demurred, smiling. "You'd better make the bargain before you make the announcement, hadn't you?"

"Oh! I'll manage that, Rosey. Ther present case before ther grand jury is ter decide whether you are to be taken in along wi' me by the general, if so be I'm his darter!"

"Of course!" General Howard decided. "If you are pards now, I shall not interrupt your compact. As to your identity, I remember that when our little Eva was born, she had a small black mole upon her right shoulder—the only mark, by the way, that we could find. Perhaps you can tell if you have the only clew that there is to identify you by."

"I have the mole upon the right shoulder, and I also think have another and stronger clew," Chip replied. "Among effects left at the death of the man I always supposed to be my father, was a small likeness which must have been my

mother's, when she was a little girl of ten or twelve years. Perhaps if you knew her when she was small, you might recognize the picture."

"Ah! where is the picture? I knew her from early childhood, and no doubt the picture is of my poor lost wife!" the general cried, excitedly.

"I have not the picture here, but I can get it when we return to the Bend," Chip replied. "I trust and hope that it will prove the missing link. Anyhow, until the proof is established, I shall count you my father, and am sure I can fill the place of the scheming woman who has held a false position so long, as your daughter."

Considerable time had been spent in the conversation, and Rosebud Rob now suggested that it was time to move on, so the ascent of the mountain was renewed.

The general was lame and illy fit to climb, but the Sport and Chip assisted him.

At last the journey was finished, and they stood on the top of Mount Rosa, far, far above the level of the Arizonian plains.

Not alone, however, for Old Hardpan had arrived ahead of them, and Wild Bill Marion, Fritz, Jerusalem, and Pigtail Pete soon made their appearance from the mountain-side.

"Now, here we are, all except Captain Mayburn. What has become of him?" Rosebud asked, when all had gathered in the ruined temple.

"Oh! he'll be along, no doubt, directly," Wild Bill said, encouragingly.

"Very true, and we may as well prepare to make ourselves at home here, until he comes, as there don't seem to be anything else to do."

Accordingly they did prepare to make themselves at home.

A meal was made out of such edibles as had been brought along, and eaten with relish.

After they had finished eating, and were in the midst of a consultation, all heard a footstep, and looked around to behold a man standing near one of the huge pillars, and that man none other than Dandy Dell Guthrie, the general's nephew.

An exclamation of surprise burst from the lips of the adventurers, and weapons were quickly drawn.

"You may as well put up your tools!" he said.

"I do not come as an enemy but as a friend, and as a betrayer of the secrets of this mountain. If you will listen I will briefly explain.

"The mountain, here, is a spent volcano. An ancient tribe of Indians built a temple upon the top, here. A few years ago a paying gold-mine was discovered down in the bosom of the hill. For over a year this mine has been in the possession of myself and the general's daughter, Evelyn. We have hired trusty men to work it, and also to work the ghost business, which I map as well tell you, has been manufactured by the aid of a cleverly contrived magic lantern and ghostly slides. All this time I have been promised that Evelyn Howard would become my wife, but to-day she has captured your leader, Mayburn, and unless prevented, will compel him to marry her, before the hour is over. We have had a quarrel, which has induced me to come and betray the secret of the mine, on condition that you will permit me to go my way, unmolested."

"That is not for us to say!" declared Rosebud Rob. "General Howard is the man you have to look to for mercy."

"If you will go and never show your villainous face in this part of the country, again, I withdraw any objections to your departure," the general said, gravely.

"Which I cheerfully promise to do," Guthrie answered. "Come! If you wish to save your captain from a forced marriage with a female devil, come with me, with weapons ready for fight, if it is necessary."

And turning, the dandy touched the pillar near which he stood, and a door flew open, revealing that the pillar was only a wooden one, and hollow. Following, the adventurers entered the pillar, and descended a rugged staircase, through what had once evidently been the flue or chimney of the volcano.

Soon they arrived in the great inter-mountain chamber, and just in time, for a significant scene was presented to their view.

The masked miners were formed in a circle, with drawn weapons, and inside the ring stood Captain Mayburn, Evelyn Howard, and another masked individual, who held a small Bible.

"Decide!" the woman's clear voice was heard to exclaim. "You have but a minute to decide between me and death!"

"I'll bet ye lie, and leave it ter yerself!" Cinnamon Chip cried, springing forward, with the others at her heels. "Throw up yer hands, every mother's son o' you, or we'll fill yer carcasses so full o' electric shocks that ye'll be too paralyzed ter reach the gates o' purgatory. Down wi' your weepens, or ye're dead men!"

The surprise was overwhelming, and taken at a disadvantage, the masked miners were wise enough to obey, and not unwillingly, either.

A little to add in conclusion.

The mystery of Mount Rosa was solved in the discovery of a gold-mine.

The Golden Idol, on examination, proved to be a clay image, washed with gold, the total value of which would not have exceeded fifty dollars.

Evelyn Howard and her masked tools, were, by the general's suggestion given their liberty, and at once left for parts unknown.

Ditto—Dandy Dell Guthrie.

The gold-mine proved to be a paying one, and the members of our adventurous party formed into a partnership, as absolute owners, and placed Wild Bill Marion as boss miner, and Captain Mayburn as treasurer. Later Rosebud Rob, Cinnamon Chip, and the general took their departure for Bummer's Bend.

Of course Chip produced the likeness, and of course the general recognized it as the picture of his long-lost wife when she was a girl—and of course Chip was received as his child.

And in all probability the general will soon be blessed with another child, in the person of Rosebud Rob, as Cinnamon Chip, or rather Eva Howard, wore an engagement ring.

Up in the volcanic bowels of Old Mount Rosa, my dear reader, you will meet with a hearty reception if you hunt up Wild Bill Marion, Old Hardpan, Cap. Mayburn and the rest, whom we will leave digging away as we write.

THE END.

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